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COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2825.

DAWN BY H. RIDER HAGGARD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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"Once more I behold the face of her
Whose actions all had the character
Of an inexpressible charm, expressed;
Whose movements flowed from a centre of rest,
And whose rest was that of a swallow, rife
With the instinct of reposing life;
Whose mirth had a sadness all the while
It sparkled and laughed, and whose sadness lay
In the heaven of such a crystal smile
That you longed to travel the self-same way
To the brightness of sorrow. For round her breathed
A grace like that of the general air,
Which softens the sharp extremes of things,
And connects by its subtle, invisible stair
The lowest and highest. She interwreathed
Her mortal obscureness with so much light
Of the world unrisen, that angel's wings
Could hardly have given her greater right
To float in the winds of the Infinite."

EDMUND OLLIER.

DAWN

BY

H. RIDER HAGGARD,

AUTHOR OF

"KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "THE WITCH'S HEAD," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1892.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

The Poem published in these pages, and entitled "A Storm on the Strings," is from the pen of Mrs. John Haggard.

DAWN.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

DEVIL CARESFOOT.

"You lie; you always were a liar, and you always will be a liar. You told my father how I spent the money."

"Well, and what if I did? I had to look after myself, I suppose. You forget that I am only here on sufferance, whilst you are the son of the house. It does not matter to you, but he would have turned me out of doors," whined George.

"Oh! curse your fine words; it's you who forget, you swab. Ay, it is you who forget that you asked me to take the money to the gambling tent, and made me promise you half of what we won, but that I should play for both. What, are you beginning to remember now—is it coming back to you after a whole month? I am going to quicken your memory up presently, I can tell you; I have got a good deal to pay off, I'm thinking. I know what you are at; you want to play cuckoo, to turn 'Cousin Philip' out that 'Cousin George' may fill the

nest. You know the old man's soft points, and you keep working him up against me. You think that you would like the old place when he's gone—ay, and I daresay that you will get it before you have done, but I mean to have my penn'orth out of you now, at any rate," and, brushing away the tears of anger that stood in his brown eyes with the back of his hand, the speaker proceeded to square up to George in a most determined way.

Now Philip, with his broad shoulders and his firm-knit frame, even at eighteen, would have been no mean antagonist for a full-grown man; much more then did he look formidable to the lanky, overgrown stripling crouching against the corner of the wall that prevented his further retreat.

"Philip, you're not going to strike me, are you, when you know you are so much stronger?"

"Yes, I am, though; if I can't match you with my tongue, at any rate I will use my fists. Look out."

"Oh, Philip, don't! I'll tell your father."

"Tell him! why, of course you will, I know that; but you shall have something to lie about this time," and he advanced to the attack with a grim determination not pleasant for his cousin to behold.

Finding that there was no escape, George turned upon him with so shrill a curse that it even frightened the tame turtle-dove from his leafy perch in the oak above, intensely preoccupied as he was in cooing to a new-found mate. He did more than curse; he fought like a cornered rat, and with as much chance as the rat has against a trained fox-terrier. In a few seconds his head was as snugly tucked away in the chancery of his cousin's arm as ever was any property in the court of that name, and, to speak truth, it seemed quite possible

that, when it emerged from that retreat, it would, like the property, be much dilapidated and extensively bled.

Let us not dwell upon the scene; for George it was a very painful one, so painful that he never quite forgot it. His nose, too, was never so straight again. It was soon over, though to one of the parties the time went with unnatural slowness.

"Well, I think you've had about enough for once," soliloquised Philip, as he critically surveyed the mass writhing on the ground before him; and he looked a very handsome lad as he said it.

His curly black hair hung in waving confusion over his forehead, and flung changing lights and shadows into the depths of his brown eyes, whilst his massive and somewhat heavy features were touched into a more active life by the light of that pleasing excitement which animates nine men out of every ten of the Anglo-Saxon race when they are engaged in killing or hurting some other living creature. The face, too, had a certain dignity about it, a little of the dignity of justice; it was the face of one who feels that, if his action has been precipitate and severe, it has at any rate been virtuous. The full but clear-cut lips also had their own expression on them, half serious, half comical; humour, contempt, and even pity were blended in it. Altogether Philip Caresfoot's appearance in this moment of boyish vengeance was pleasing and not uninteresting.

Presently, however, something of the same change passed over his face that we see in the sky when a cloud passes over the sun; the light faded out of it. It was astonishing to note how dull and heavy—ay, more, how bad it made him look all in a breath.

"There will be a pretty business about this," he mur-

mured, and then, administering a sharp kick to the prostrate and groaning form on the ground before him, he said, "Now, then, get up; I'm not going to touch you again. Perhaps, though, you won't be in quite such a hurry to tell lies about me another time, though I suppose that one must always expect a certain amount of lying from a half-bred beggar like you. Like mother, like son, you know."

This last sentence was accompanied by a bitter laugh, and produced a decided effect on the grovelling George, who slowly raised himself upon his hands, and, lifting his head, looked his cousin full in the face.

It was not the ghastly appearance of his mangled and blood-soaked countenance that made Philip recoil so sharply from the sight of his own handiwork—he had fought too often at school to be chicken-hearted about a little bloodshed; and, besides, he knew that his cousin was only knocked about, not really injured—but rather the intense and almost devilish malignity of the expression which hovered on the blurred features and in the half-closed eyes. But no attempt was made by George to translate the look into words, and indeed Philip felt it to be untranslateable. Also he felt dimly that the hate and malice with which he was regarded by the individual at his feet was of a more concentrated and enduring character than most men have power to originate. In the lurid light of that one glance he was able, though he was not very clever, to pierce the darkest recesses of his cousin's heart, and to see his inmost thought, no longer through a veil, but face to face. And what he saw was sufficient to make the blood leave his ruddy cheek, and to fix his eyes into an expression of fear.

Next second George dropped his head on to the

ground again, and began to moan in an ostentatious manner, possibly in order to attract some one whose footsteps could be plainly heard proceeding slowly down a shrubbery-path on the other side of the yard wall. At any rate, that was the effect produced; for next moment, before Philip could think of escape, had he wished to escape, a door in the wall was opened, and a gentleman, pausing on the threshold, surveyed the whole scene, with the assistance of a gold-mounted eye-glass, with some evident surprise and little apparent satisfaction.

The old gentleman, for he was old, made so pretty a picture, framed as he was in the arched doorway, and set off by a natural background of varying shades of green, that his general appearance is worth sketching as he stood. To begin with, he was dressed in the fashion of the commencement of this century, and, as has been said, was old, though it would be difficult to say how old. Indeed, so vigorous and comparatively youthful was his bearing that he was generally taken to be considerably under seventy, but, as a matter of fact, he was but a few years short of eighty. He was extremely tall, over six feet, and stood upright as a life-guardsman; indeed, his height and stately carriage would alone have made him a remarkable-looking man, had there been nothing else unusual about him; but, as it happened, his features were as uncommon as his person. They were clear-cut and cast in a noble mould. The nose was large and aquiline, the chin, like his son Philip's, square and determined; but it was his eyes that gave a painful fascination to his countenance. They were steely blue, and glittered under the pent-house of his thick eyebrows, that, in striking contrast to the snow-white of his hair, were black in hue, as tempered steel glitters in a curtained

room. It was those eyes, in conjunction with sundry little peculiarities of temper, that had earned for the old man the title of "Devil Caresfoot," a sobriquet in which he took peculiar pride. So pleased was he with it, indeed, that he caused it to be engraved in solid oak letters an inch long upon the frame of a life-sized and life-like portrait of himself that hung over the staircase in the house.

"I am determined," he would say to his son, "to be known to my posterity as I was known to my contemporaries. The picture represents my person not inaccurately; from the nickname my descendants will be able to gather what the knaves and fools with whom I lived thought of my character. Ah! boy, I am wearing out; people will soon be staring at that portrait and wondering if it was like me. In a very few years I shall no longer be 'devil,' but 'devilled,'" and he would chuckle at his grim and ill-omened joke.

Philip felt his father's eyes playing upon him, and shrunk from them. At the mere thought of the consequences of his chastisement of his cousin, his face had lost the beauty and animation that had clothed it a minute before; now it grew leaden and hard, the good died away from it altogether, and, instead of a young god bright with vengeance, there was nothing but a sullen youth with dull and frightened eyes. To his son, as to most people who came under his influence, "Devil" Caresfoot was a grave reality.

Presently the picture in the doorway opened its mouth and spoke in a singularly measured, gentle voice.

"You will forgive me, Philip, for interrupting your *tête-à-tête,* but may I ask what is the meaning of this?"

Philip returned no answer.

"Since your cousin is not in a communicative mood, George, perhaps you will inform me why you are lying on your face and groaning in that unpleasant and aggressive manner?"

George lifted his blood-stained face from the stones, and, looking at his uncle, groaned louder than ever.

"May I ask you, Philip, if George has fallen down and hurt himself, or if there has been an—an—altercation between you?"

Here George himself got up and, before Philip could make any reply, addressed himself to his uncle.

"Sir," he said, "I will answer for Philip; there *has* been an altercation, and he in the scuffle knocked me down, and I confess," here he put his hand up to his battered face, "that I am suffering a good deal, but what I want to say is, that I beg you will not blame Philip. He thought that I had wronged him, and, though I am quite innocent, and could easily have cleared myself had he given me a chance, I must admit that appearances are to a certain extent against me——"

"He lies!" broke in Philip, sullenly.

"You will wonder, sir," went on the blood-stained George, "how I allowed myself to be drawn into such a brutal affair, and one so discreditable to your house. I can only say that I am very sorry,"—which indeed he was—"and that I should never have taken any notice of his words—knowing how he would regret them on reflection—had he not in an unguarded moment allowed himself to taunt me with my birth. Uncle, you know the misfortune of my father's marriage, and that she was not his equal in birth, but you know too that she was my mother and I love her memory though I never saw her, and I could not bear to hear her spoken of like that, and

I struck him. I hope that both you and he will forgive me; I cannot say any more."

"He lies again; he cannot speak the truth," said Philip.

"Philip, will you allow me to point out," remarked his father, in his blandest voice, "that the continued repetition of the very ugly word 'lie' is neither narrative nor argument. Perhaps you will be so kind as to tell me your side of this story; you know I always wish to be perfectly impartial."

"He lied to you this morning about the money. It's true enough that I gambled away the ten pounds at Roxham fair, instead of paying it in to the bank as you told me, but he persuaded me to it, and he was to have shared the profits if we won. I was a blackguard, but he was a bigger blackguard; why should I have all the blame and have that fellow continually shoved down my throat as a saint? And so I thrashed him, and that is all about it."

"Sir, I am sorry to contradict Philip, but indeed he is in error; the recollection of what took place has escaped him. I could, if necessary, bring forward evidence—Mr. Bellamy——"

"There is no need, George, for you to continue," and then, fixing his glittering eye on Philip: "It is very melancholy for me, having only one son, to know him to be such a brute, such a bearer of false witness, such an impostor as you are. Do you know that I have just seen Mr. Bellamy, the head clerk of the bank, and inquired if he knew anything of what happened about that ten pounds, and do you know what he told me?"

"No, I don't, and I don't want to."

"But I really must beg your attention: he told me that the day following the fair your cousin George came

to the bank with ten pounds, and told him how you had spent the ten pounds I gave you to pay in, and that he brought the money, his own savings, to replace what you had gambled away; and Bellamy added that, under all the circumstances, he did not feel justified in placing it to my credit. What have you to say to that?"

"What have I to say? I have to say that I don't believe a word of it. If George had meant to do me a good turn he would have paid the money in and said nothing to Bellamy about it. Why won't you trust me a little more, father? I tell you that you are turning me into a scoundrel. I am being twisted up into a net of lies till I am obliged to lie myself to keep clear of ruin. I know what this sneak is at; he wants to work you into cutting me out of the property which should be mine by right. He knows your weaknesses——"

"My weaknesses, sir—my weaknesses!" thundered his father, striking his gold-headed cane on to the stones; "what do you mean by that?"

"Hush, uncle, he meant nothing," broke in George.

"Meant nothing! Then for an idle speech it is one that may cost him dear. Look you here, Philip Caresfoot, I know very well that our family has been quite as remarkable for its vices as its virtues, but for the last two hundred and fifty years we have been gentlemen, and you are not a gentleman; we have not been thieves, and you have proved yourself a thief; we have spoken the truth, and you are, what you are so fond of calling your cousin, who is worth two of you, a liar. Now listen. However imperious I may have grown in my old age, I can still respect the man who thwarts me, even though I hate him; but I despise the man who deceives me as I despise you, my son Philip—and I tell you this, and I

beg you to lay it to heart, that if ever again I find that you have deceived me, by Heaven I will disinherit you in favour of—*oh, oh!*" and the old man fell back against the grey wall, pressing his hands to his breast and with the cold perspiration starting on to his pallid countenance.

Both the lads sprang forward, but before they reached him he had recovered himself.

"It is nothing," he said, in his ordinary gentle voice, "a trifling indisposition. I wish you both good morning, and beg you to bear my words in mind."

When he was fairly gone, George came up to his cousin and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Why do you insist upon quarrelling with me, Philip? It always ends like this; you get the worst of it."

But Philip's only reply was to shake him roughly off, and to vanish through the door towards the lake. George regarded his departing form with a peculiar smile, which was rendered even more peculiar by the distortion of his swollen features.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE CARESFOOTS CAME TO BRATHAM.

It is difficult to imagine any study that would prove more fascinating in itself or more instructive in its issues, than the examination of the leading characteristics of individual families as displayed through a series of generations. But it is a subject which from its very nature is more or less unapproachable, since it is but little that we know even of our immediate ancestors. Occasionally, in glancing at the cracking squares of canvas, many of which cannot even boast a name, but which alone remain to speak of the real and active life, the joys and griefs, the

sins and virtues that centred in the originals of those hard daubs and of ourselves, we may light upon a face that about six generations since was the counterpart of the little boy upon our shoulder, or the daughter standing at our side. In the same way too, partly through tradition and partly by other means, we are sometimes able to trace in ourselves and in our children the strong development of characteristics that distinguished the race centuries ago.

If local tradition and such records of their individual lives as remained are worthy of any faith, it is beyond a doubt that the Caresfoots of Bratham Abbey had handed down their own hard and peculiar cast of character from father to son unaffected in the main by the continual introduction of alien blood on the side of the mother.

The history of the Caresfoot family had nothing remarkable about it. They had been yeomen at Bratham from time immemorial, perhaps ever since the village had become a geographical fact; but it was on the dissolution of the monasteries that they first became of any importance in the county. Bratham Abbey, which had shared the common fate, was granted by Henry VIII. to a certain courtier, Sir Charles Varry by name. For two years the owner never came near his new possession, but one day he appeared in the village, and riding to the house of Farmer Caresfoot, which was its most respectable tenement, he begged him to show him the Abbey house and the lands attached. It was a dark November afternoon, and by the time the farmer and his wearied guest had crossed the soaked lands and reached the great grey house, the damps and shadows of the night had begun to curtain it and to render its appearance, forsaken as it was, inexpressibly dreary and lonesome.

"Damp here, my friend, is it not?" said Sir Charles with a shudder, looking towards the lake, into which the rain was splashing.

"You are right, it be."

"And lonely too, now that the old monks have gone."

"Ay, but they do say that the house be mostly full of the spirits of the dead," and the yeoman sank his voice to an awed whisper.

Sir Charles crossed himself and muttered, "I can well believe it," and then, addressing his companion—

"You do not know of any man who would buy an abbey with all its rights and franchises, do you, friend?"

"Not rightly, sir; the land be so poor it hath no heart in it; it doth scarce repay the tillage, and what the house is you may see. The curse of the monks is on it. But still, sir, if you have a mind to be rid of the place, I have a little laid by and a natural love for the land, having been bred on it, and taken the colour of my mind and my stubby growth therefrom, and I will give you—" and this astutest of all the Caresfoots whispered a very small sum into Sir Charles' ear.

"Your price is very small, good friend, it doth almost vanish into nothing; and methinks the land that reared you cannot be so unkind as you would have me think. The monks did not love bad land, but yet, if thou hast it in the gold, I will take it; it will pay off a debt or two, and I care not for the burden of the land."

And so Farmer Caresfoot became the lawful owner of Bratham Abbey with its two advowsons, its royal franchises of treasure-trove and deodand, and more than a thousand acres of the best land in Marlshire.

The same astuteness that had enabled this wise progenitor to acquire the estate enabled his descendants to

stick tightly to it, and though, like other families, they had at times met with reverses, they never lost their grip of the Abbey property. During the course of the first half of the nineteenth century the land increased largely in value, and its acreage was considerably added to by the father of the present owner, a man of frugal mind, but with the family mania for the collection of all sorts of plate strongly developed. But it was Philip's father, "Devil" Caresfoot, who, during his fifty years' tenure of the property, had raised the family to its present opulent condition, firstly, by a strict attention to business and the large accumulations resulting from his practice of always living upon half his income, and secondly, by his marriage late in middle life with Miss Bland, the heiress of the neighbouring Isleworth estates, that stretched over some two thousand acres of land.

This lady, who was Philip's mother, did not live long to enjoy her wealth and station. Her husband never spoke a rough word to her, and yet it is no exaggeration to say that she died from fear of him. The marriage had been one of convenience, not of affection; indeed poor Anna Bland had secretly admired the curate at Isleworth, and hated Mr. Caresfoot and his glittering eye. But she married him for all that, to feel that till she died that glance was always playing round her like a rapier in the hands of a skilled fencer. And very soon she did die, Mr. Caresfoot receiving her last words and wishes with the same exquisite and unmoved politeness that he had extended to every remark she had made to him in the course of their married life. Having satisfactorily eyed Mrs. Caresfoot off into a better world, her husband gave up all idea of further matrimonial ventures, and set himself to heap up riches. But a little before his wife's

death, and just after his son's birth, an event had occurred in the family that disturbed him not a little.

His father had left two sons, himself and a brother many years his junior. Now his brother was very dear to Mr. Caresfoot; his affection for him was the one weak point in his armour; nor was it rendered any the less sincere, but rather the more touching, by the fact that its object was little better than half-witted. It is therefore easy to imagine his distress and anger when he heard that a woman who had till shortly before been kitchen-maid at the Abbey House, and was now living in the village, had been confined of a son which she fixed upon his brother, whose wife she declared herself to be. Investigation only brought out the truth of the story; his weak-minded brother had been entrapped into a glaring *mésalliance*.

But Mr. Caresfoot proved himself equal to the occasion. So soon as his "sister-in-law," as it pleased him to call her sardonically, had sufficiently recovered, he called upon her. What took place at the visit never transpired, but next day Mrs. E. Caresfoot left her native place never to return, the child remaining with the father, or rather with the uncle. That boy was George. At the time when this story opens both his parents were dead: his father from illness resulting from entire failure of brain power, the mother from drink.

Whether it was that he considered the circumstances of the lad's birth to entitle him to peculiar consideration, or that he transferred to him the affection he bore his father, the result was that his nephew was quite as dear if not dearer to Mr. Caresfoot than his own son. Not, however, that he allowed his preference to be apparent, save in the negative way that he was blind to faults in George which

he was sufficiently quick to note in Philip. To observers this partiality seemed the more strange when they thought upon Philip's bonny face and form, and then noted how the weak-brained father and coarse-blooded mother had left their mark in George's thick lips, small, restless eyes, pallid complexion, and loose-jointed form.

When Philip shook off his cousin's grasp and vanished towards the lake, he did so with bitter wrath and hatred in his heart, for he saw but too clearly that he had deeply injured himself in his father's estimation, and, what was more, he felt that so much as he had sunk his side of the balance, by so much he had raised up that of George. He was inculpated; a Bellamy came upon the scene to save George, and, what was worse, an untruthful Bellamy; he was the aggressor, and George the meek in spirit with the soft answer that turneth away wrath. It was intolerable; he hated his father, he hated George. There was no justice in the world, and he had not wit to play rogue with such a one as his cousin. Appearances were always against him; he hated everybody.

And then he began to think that there was in the very next parish somebody whom he did not hate, but who, on the contrary, interested him, and was always ready to listen to his troubles, and he also became aware of the fact that whilst his mind had been thinking his legs had been walking, and that he was very near the abode of that person—almost at its gates, in short. He paused and looked at his watch; it had stopped at half-past eleven, the one blow that George had succeeded in planting upon him having landed on it, to the great detriment of both the watch and the striker's knuckles; but the sun told him that it was about half-past twelve, not too early to call. So he opened the gate, and ad-

vancing up an avenue of old beeches to a square, red-brick house of the time of Queen Anne, boldly rang the bell.

Was Miss Lee at home? Yes, Miss Lee was in the green-house; perhaps Mr. Philip would step into the garden, which Mr. Philip did accordingly.

"How do you do, Philip? I'm delighted to see you; you've just come in time to help in the slaughter."

"Slaughter, slaughter of what—a pig?"

"No, green fly. I'm going to kill thousands."

"You cruel girl."

"I daresay it is cruel, but I don't care. Grumps always said that I had no heart, and, so far as green fly are concerned, Grumps was certainly right. Now, just look at this lily. It is an auratum. I gave three-and-six (out of my own money) for that bulb last autumn, and now the bloom is not worth twopence, all through green fly. If I were a man I declare I should swear. Please swear for me, Philip. Go outside and do it, so that I mayn't have it on my conscience. But now for vengeance. Oh, I say, I forgot, you know, I suppose. I ought to be looking very sorry——"

"Why, what's the matter? Any one dead?"

"Oh, no, so much better than that. *It's got Grumps.*"

"Got her, what has got her? What is 'it'?"

"Why, Chancery, of course. I always call Chancery 'it.' I wouldn't take its name in vain for worlds. I am too much afraid. I might be made to 'show a cause why,' and then be locked up for contempt, which frequently happens after you have tried to 'show a cause.' That is what has happened to Grumps. She is now showing a cause; shortly she will be locked up. When she comes out, if she ever does come out, I think that she will avoid

wards in Chancery in future; she will have too much sympathy with them, and too much practical experience of their position."

"But what on earth do you mean, Maria? What has happened to Miss Gregson?" (*anglicè* Grumps).

"Well, you remember one of my guardians, or rather his wife, got 'it' to appoint her my chaperon, but my other guardian wanted to appoint somebody else, and, after taking eighteen months to do it, he has moved the court to show that Grumps is not a 'fit and proper person.' The idea of calling Grumps improper! She nearly fainted at it, and swore that, whether she lived through it or whether she didn't, she would never come within a mile of me or any other ward if she could help it, not even the ward of an hospital. I told her to be careful, or she would be 'committing contempt,' which frightened her so that she hardly spoke again till she left yesterday. Poor Grumps! I expect she is on bread and water now; but if she makes herself half as disagreeable to the Vice-Chancellor as she did to me, I don't believe that they will keep her long. She'll wear the gaolers out; she will wear the walls out; she will wear 'it' down to the bone; and then they will let her loose upon the world again. Why, there is the bell for lunch, and not a single green fly the less! Never mind, I will do for them to-morrow. How it would add to her sufferings in her lonely cell if she could see us going to a *tête-à-tête* lunch. Come on, Philip, come quick, or the cutlets will get cold, and I hate cold cutlets." And off she tripped, followed by the laughing Philip, who, by the way, was now looking quite handsome again.

Maria Lee was not very pretty at her then age—just eighteen—but she was a perfect specimen of a young

English country girl; fresh as a rose, sound as a bell, and endowed besides with a quick wit and a ready sympathy. She belonged essentially to that stamp of Englishwomen who make the British upper middle class what it is—one of the finest and soundest in the world. Philip, following her into the house, thought that she was charming; nor, being a Caresfoot, and therefore having a considerable eye to the main chance, did the fact of her being the heiress to fifteen hundred a year in land detract from her charms.

The cutlets were excellent, and Maria ate three, and was very comical about the departed Grumps; indeed, anybody not acquainted with the circumstances would have gathered that this excellent lady was to be shortly put to the question. Philip was not quite so merry; he was oppressed both by recollections of what had happened and apprehensions of what might happen.

"What is the matter, Philip?" she asked, when they had left the table to sit under the trees on the lawn. "I can see that something is the matter. Tell me all about it, Philip."

And Philip told her what had happened that morning, laying bare all his heart-aches, and not even concealing his evil deeds. When he had done, she pondered a while, tapping her little foot upon the turf.

"Philip," she said at last, in quite a changed voice, "I do not think that you are being well treated. I do not think that your cousin means kindly by you, but—but I do not think that you have behaved rightly either. I don't like that about the ten pounds; and I think that you should not have touched George; he is not so strong as you. Please try to do as your father—dear me, I am sure I don't wonder that you are afraid of him; I am—

tells you, and regain his affection, and make it up with George; and, if you get into any more troubles, come and tell me about them before you do anything foolish; for though, according to Grumps, I am silly enough, two heads are better than one."

The tears stood in the lad's brown eyes as he listened to her. He gulped them down, however, and said—

"You are awfully kind to me; you are the only friend I have. Sometimes I think that you are an angel."

"Nonsense, Philip. If 'it' heard you talk like that, you would join Grumps. Don't let me hear any more such stuff;" but though she spoke sharply, somehow she did not look displeased.

"I must be off," he said, at length. "I promised to go with my father to see a new building on Reynold's farm. I have only twenty minutes to get home;" and rising they went into the house through a French window opening on to the lawn.

In the dining-room he turned, and, after a moment's hesitation, stuttered out—

"Maria, don't be angry with me, but may I give you a kiss?"

She blushed vividly.

"How dare you suggest such a thing?—but—but as Grumps has gone, and there is no new Grumps to refer to, and therefore I can only consult my own wishes, perhaps if you really wish to, Philip, why, Philip, you may."

And he did.

When he was gone she leant her head against the cold marble mantelpiece.

"I do love him," she murmured, "yes, that I do."

CHAPTER III.

CARESFOOT'S STAFF.

PHILIP was not very fond of taking walks with his father, since he found that in nine cases out of ten they afforded opportunities for the inculcation of facts of the dryest description with reference to estate management, or to the narration by his parent of little histories of which his conduct upon some recent occasion would adorn the moral. On this particular occasion the prospect was particularly unpleasant, for his father, he was well aware, would overflow with awful politeness, indeed, after the scene of the morning, it could not be otherwise. Oh, how much rather would he have spent that lovely afternoon with Maria Lee! Dear Maria, he would go and see her again the very next day.

When he arrived, some ten minutes after time in the antler-hung hall of the Abbey House, he found his father standing, watch in hand, exactly under the big clock, as though he was determined to make a note by double entry of every passing second.

"When I asked you to walk with me this afternoon, Philip, I, if my memory does not deceive me, was careful to say that I had no wish to interfere with any prior engagement. I was aware how little interest, compared with your cousin George, you take in the estate, and I had no wish to impose an uncongenial task. But, as you kindly volunteered to accompany me, I regret that you did not find it convenient to be punctual to the time you fixed. I have now waited for you for seventeen minutes, and let me tell you that at my time of life I cannot afford to lose seventeen minutes. May I ask what has delayed you?"

This long speech had given Philip the opportunity of recovering the breath that he had lost in running home. He replied promptly—

"I have been lunching with Miss Lee."

"Oh, indeed, then I no longer wonder that you kept me waiting, and I must say that in this particular I commend your taste. Miss Lee is a young lady of good family, good manners, and good means. If her estate went with this property it would complete as pretty a five thousand acres of mixed soil as there is in the county. Those are beautiful old meadows of hers, beautiful. Perhaps—" but here the old man checked himself.

On leaving the house they had passed together down a walk called the tunnel walk, a name it had acquired from the arching boughs of the lime-trees that interlaced themselves overhead. At the end of this avenue, and on the borders of the lake, there stood an enormous but still growing oak, known as Caresfoot's Staff. It was the old squire's favourite tree, and the best topped piece of timber for many miles round.

"I wonder," said Philip, by way of making a little pleasant conversation, "why that tree was called Caresfoot's Staff."

"Your ignorance astonishes me, Philip, but I suppose that there are some people who can live for years in a place and yet imbibe nothing of its traditions. Perhaps you know that the monks were driven out of these ruins by Henry VIII. Well, on the spot where that tree now stands there grew a still greater oak, a giant tree, its trunk measured sixteen loads of timber; which had, as tradition said, been planted by the first prior of the Abbey when England was still Saxon. The night the monks left a great gale raged over England. It was in

October, when the trees were still full of leaf, and its fiercest gust tore the great oak from its roothold, and flung it into the lake. Look! do you see that rise in the sand, there, by the edge of the deep pool, in the eight foot water? That is where it is supposed to lie. Well, the whole country-side said that it was a sign that the monks had gone for ever from Bratham Abbey, and the country-side was right. But when your ancestor, old yeoman Caresfoot, bought this place and came to live here, in a year when there was a great black frost that set the waters of the lake like one of the new-fangled roads, he asked his neighbours, ay and his labouring folk, to come and dine with him and drink to the success of his purchase. It was a proud day for him, and when dinner was done and they were all mellow with strong ale, he bade them step down to the borders of the lake, as he would have them be witness to a ceremony. When they reached the spot they saw a curious sight, for there on a strong dray, and dragged by Farmer Caresfoot's six best horses, was an oak of fifty years' growth coming across the ice, earth, roots, and all.

"On that spot where the tree now stands, a great hole, ten feet deep by fourteen square, had been dug to receive it, and into that hole Caresfoot Staff was tilted and levered off the dray. And when it had been planted, and the frozen earth was well trodden in, your grandfather in the ninth degree brought his guests back to the old banqueting-hall, and made a speech which, as it was the first and last he ever made, was long remembered in the country-side. Put into modern English, it ran something like this:

"'Neighbours,—Prior's Oak has gone into the water, and folks said it was for a sign that the monks would

never come back to Bratham, and that it was the Lord's wind which put it there. And, neighbours, as ye know, the broad Bratham lands and the fat marshes down by the brook passed by king's grant to a man that knew not clay from loam, or layer from pasturage, and from him they passed by the Lord's will to me, as I have asked you here to-day to celebrate. And now, neighbours, I have had a mind, and though it seem to you but a childish thing, yet I have a mind, and have set myself to fulfil it. While I was yet a little lad, and drove the swine out to feed on the hill yonder, when the acorns had fallen, afore Farmer Gyrton's father had gracious leave from the feoffees to put up the fence that doth now so sorely vex us, I found one day a great acorn, as big as a dow's egg, and of a rich and wondrous brown, and this acorn I bore home and planted in kind earth in the corner of my dad's garden, thinking that it would grow, and that one day I would hew its growth and make of it a staff. Now that was fifty long years ago, lads, and there where grew Prior's Oak, there, neighbours, I have set my Staff to-day. The monks have told us how in Israel every man planted his fig and his vine. For the fig, I know not rightly what that is; but as for the vine, I will plant no creeping, clinging vine, but a hearty English oak, that, if they do but give it good room to breathe in, and save their heirloom from the axe, shall cast shade and throw acorns, and burst into leaf in the spring and grow naked in the winter, when ten generations of our children, and our children's children, shall have mixed their dust with ours yonder in the graveyard. And now, neighbours, I have talked too long, though I am better at doing than talking; but ye will even forgive me, for I will not talk to you again, though on this the

great day of my life I was minded to speak. But I will bid you every man pledge a health to Caresfoot's Staff, and ask a prayer that, so long as it shall push its leaves, so long may the race of my loins be here to sit beneath its shade, and even mahap when the corn is ripe and the moon is up, and their hearts grow soft towards the past, to talk with kinsman or with sweetheart of the old man who struck it in this kindly soil.'"

The old squire's face grew tender as he told this legend of the forgotten dead, and Philip's young imagination summoned up the strange old-world scene of the crowd of rustics gathered in the snow and frost round this very tree.

"Philip," said his father, suddenly, "you will hold the yeoman's Staff one day; be like it of an oaken English heart, and you will defy wind and weather as it has done, and as your forbears have done. Come, we must go on."

"By the way, Philip," he continued, after a while, "you will remember what I said to you this morning—I hope that you will remember it, though I spoke in anger—never try to deceive me again, or you will regret it. And now I have something to say to you. I wish you to go to college and receive an education that will fit you to hold a position you must in the course of Nature one day fill in the county. The Oxford term begins in a few days, and you have for some years been entered at Magdalen College. I do not expect you to be a scholar, but I do expect you to brush off your rough ways and local ideas, and to learn to become such a person both in conduct and mind as a gentleman of your station should be."

"Is George to go to college too?"

"No; I have spoken to him on the subject, and he does

not wish it. He says very wisely that, with his small prospects, he would rather spend the time in learning how to earn his living. So he is going to be articled to the Roxham lawyers, Foster and Son, or rather Foster and Bellamy, for young Bellamy, who is a lawyer by profession, came here this morning, not to speak about you, but on a message from the firm to say that he is now a junior partner, and that he will be very happy to take George as articled clerk. He is a hard-working, shrewd young man, and it will be a great advantage to George to have his advice and example before him."

Philip assented, and went on in silence, reflecting on the curious change in his immediate prospects that this walk had brought to light. He was much rejoiced at the prospect of losing sight of George for a while, and was sufficiently intelligent to appreciate the advantages, social and mental, which the University would offer him; but it struck him that there were two things which he did not like about the scheme. The first of these was, that whilst he was pursuing his academical studies, George would practically be left on the spot—for Roxham was only six miles off—to put in motion any schemes he might have devised; and Philip was sure that he had devised schemes. The second was, that Oxford was a long way from Maria Lee. However, he kept his objections to himself. In due course they reached the buildings they had set out to examine, and the old squire, with characteristic promptitude and shrewdness, having settled what should be done, and what should be left undone, they turned homewards.

In passing through the shrubberies, on their way back to the house, they suddenly came upon a stolid-looking lad of about fifteen, emerging from a side-walk, with a nest full of young blackbirds in his hand. Now, if there

was one thing in the world more calculated than another to rouse the most objectionable traits of the old squire's character into rapid action, it was the discovery of boys, and more especially of bird-nesting boys, in his plantations. In the first place, he hated trespassers; and in the second, it was one of his simple pleasures to walk in the early morning and listen to the singing of the birds that swarmed around. Accordingly, he stopped suddenly at the obnoxious sight, and, drawing himself up to his full stature, addressed the trembling youth in his sweetest voice.

"Your name is, I believe—Brady—Jim Brady—correct me if I am wrong—and you have come here, you—you—young—villain—to steal my birds."

The frightened boy walked slowly backwards, followed by the old man, whose fiery eyes were fixed upon his face, till at last concussion against the trunk of a great tree prevented further retreat. Here he stood for about thirty seconds, writhing under the glance that seemed to pierce him through and through, till at last he could bear it no longer, but flung himself on the ground, roaring:

"Oh! don't ee, squire; don't ee now look at me with that 'ere eye. Take and thrash me, squire, but don't ee fix me so! I hayn't had no more nor twenty this year, and a nest of spinxes, and Tom Smith he's had fifty-two and a young owl. Oh! oh!"

Enraged beyond measure at this last piece of information, Mr. Caresfoot took the victim at his word, and, ceasing from ocular experiments, laid into the less honourable portion of the boy's form with the gold-headed malacca cane in a way which astonished the prostrate Jim, though he was afterwards heard to declare that the squire's cane "warn't not nothing compared with the

squire's eye, which wore a hot coal, it wore, and frizzled your innards as sich."

When Jim Brady had gone, never to return again, and the old man had recovered his usual suavity of manner, he remarked to his son:

"There is some curious property in the human eye; a property that is, I believe, very much developed in my own. Did you observe the effect of my glance upon that boy? I was trying an experiment on him. I remember it was always the same with your poor mother. She could never bear me to look at her."

Philip made no reply, but he thought that it was not very wonderful if she had been the object of experiments of this nature.

Shortly after their return home he received a note from Miss Lee. It ran thus:

"My dear Philip,

"What *do* you think? Just after you had gone away, I got by the post, which Jones (the butcher) brought from Roxham, several letters, amongst them one from Grumps and one from Uncle Tom. Grumps has shown a cause. Why? 'It' said that she was not an improper person; but, for all that, she is so angry with Uncle Tom that she will not come back, but has accepted an offer to go to Canada as companion to a lady; so farewell Grumps.

"Now for Uncle Tom. 'It' suggested that I should live with some of my relations until I came of age, and pay them four hundred a year, which I think a good deal. I am sure it can't cost four hundred a year to feed me, though I have such an appetite. I had no idea that they were so fond of me before; they all want me to come and live with them, except Aunt Chambers, who,

you know, lives in Jersey. Uncle Tom says in his letter that he shall be glad if his daughters can have the advantage of my example, and of studying my polished manners (just fancy *my* polished manners; and I know, because little Tom, who is a brick, told me, that only last year he heard his father tell Emily—she's the eldest—that I was a dowdy, snub-nosed, ill-mannered miss, but that she must keep in with me and flatter me up). No, I will not live with Uncle Tom, and I will tell 'it' so. If I must leave my home, I will go to Aunt Chambers at Jersey. Jersey is a beautiful place for flowers, and one learns French there without the trouble of learning it; and I like Aunt Chambers, and she has no children, and nothing but the memory of a dear departed. But I don't like leaving home, and feel very much inclined to cry. *Hang* the Court of Chancery, and Uncle Tom and his interference too—*there!* I suppose you can't find time to come over to-morrow morning to see me off?—Goodbye, dear Philip,

"Your affectionate friend,

"MARIA LEE."

Philip did manage to find time next morning, and came back looking very disconsolate.

CHAPTER IV.

PHILIP MEETS HILDA.

PHILIP went to college in due course, and George departed to learn his business as a lawyer at Roxham. It will not, however, be necessary for us to enter into the details of their respective careers during this period of their lives.

At college Philip did fairly well, and, being a Caresfoot, did not run into debt. As his great bodily strength gave promise of, he was a first-class athlete, and for two years stroked the Magdalen boat. Nor did he altogether neglect his books, but his reading was of a desultory and out-of-the way order, and much directed towards the investigation of mystical subjects. Fairly well liked amongst the men with whom he mixed, he could hardly be called popular; his temperament was too uncertain to ensure it. At times he was the gayest of the gay, then when the fit took him he would be plunged into a state of gloomy depression that might last for days. His companions, to whom his mystical studies were a favourite jest, were wont to assert that on these occasions he was preparing for a visit from his familiar, but the joke was one that he never could be prevailed upon to appreciate. The truth was that these fits of gloom were constitutional with Philip, and very possibly had their origin in the state of his mother's mind before his birth, when her whole thoughts were coloured by her morbid and fanciful terror of her husband, and her frantic anxiety to conciliate him.

During the three years that he spent at college, Philip saw but little of George, since, when he happened to be down at Bratham, which was not often, for he spent most of his vacations abroad, George avoided coming there as much as possible. Indeed, there was a tacit agreement between the two young men that they would see as little of each other as might be convenient. But, though he did not see much of him himself, Philip was none the less aware that George's influence over his father was on the increase. The old squire's letters were full of him and of the admirable way in which he managed the estate, for it was now practically in his hands. Indeed,

to Philip's surprise and somewhat to his disgust, he found that George began to be spoken of indifferently with himself as the "young squire." Long before his college days had come to an end Philip had determined that he would do his best, as soon as opportunity offered, to reduce his cousin to his proper place, not by the violent means to which he had resorted in other days, but rather by showing himself to be equally capable, equally assiduous, and equally respectful and affectionate.

At last the day came when he was to bid farewell to Oxford for good, and in due course he found himself in a second-class railway carriage bound for Roxham, for thinking it useless to waste money, Philip always went second.

Just before the train left the platform at Paddington, Philip was agreeably surprised out of his meditations by the entry into his carriage of an extremely elegant and stately young lady, a foreigner, as he judged from her strong accent when she addressed the porter. With the innate gallantry of twenty-one, he immediately laid himself out to make the acquaintance of one possessed of such proud yet melting blue eyes, such lovely hair, and a figure that would not have disgraced Diana; and, with this view, set himself to render her such little services as one fellow-traveller can offer to another. They were accepted reservedly at first, then gratefully, and before long the reserve broke down entirely, and this very handsome pair dropped into a conversation as animated as the lady's broken English would allow. The lady told him that her name was Hilda von Holtzhausen, that she was of a German family, and had come to England to enter a family as companion, in order to obtain a perfect knowledge of the English language. She had already been

to France and acquired French; when she knew English, then she had been promised a place as school-mistress under government in her own country. Her father and mother were dead, and she had no brothers or sisters, and very few friends.

Where was she going to? She was going to a place called Roxham; here it was written on the ticket. She was going to be companion to a dear young lady, very rich, like all the English, whom she had met when she had travelled with her French family to Jersey, a Miss Lee.

"You don't say so!" said Philip. "Has she come back to Rewtham?"

"What, do you, then, know her?"

"Yes—that is, I used to three years ago. I live in the next parish."

"Ah! then perhaps you are the gentleman of whom I have heard her to speak, Mr. Car-es-foot, whom she did seem to appear to love; is not that the word?—to be very fond of, you know."

Philip laughed, blushed, and acknowledged his identity with the gentleman whom Miss Lee "did seem to appear to love."

"Oh! I am glad; then we shall be friends, and see each other—shall we not?"

He declared unreservedly that she should see him very often.

From Fräulein von Holtzhausen Philip gathered in the course of their journey a good many particulars about Miss Lee. It appeared that, having attained her majority, she was coming back to live at her old home at Rewtham, whither she had tried to persuade her Aunt Chambers to accompany her, but without success, that lady being too much attached to Jersey to leave it. During the

course of a long stay on the island, the two girls had become fast friends, and the friendship had culminated in an offer being made by Maria Lee to Fräulein von Holtzhausen to come and live with her as companion, a proposal that exactly suited the latter.

The mention of Miss Lee's name had awakened pleasant recollections in Philip's mind, recollections that, at any other time, might have tended towards the sentimental; but, when under fire from the blue eyes of this stately foreigner, it was impossible for him to feel sentimental about anybody save herself. "The journey is over all too soon," was the secret thought of each as they stepped on to the Roxham platform. Before they had finally said good-bye, however, a young lady with a dainty figure, in a shady hat and pink and white dress, came running along the platform.

"Hilda, Hilda, here I am! How do you do, dear? Welcome home," and she was about to seal her welcome with a kiss, when her eye fell upon Philip standing by.

"Oh, Philip!" she cried, with a blush, "don't you know me? Have I changed much? I should have known you anywhere; and I am glad to see you, awfully glad (excuse the slang, but it is such a relief to be able to say 'awful' without being pulled up by Aunt Chambers). Just think, it is three years since we met. Do you remember Grumps? How do I look? Do you think you will like me as much as you used to?"

"I think that you are looking the same dear girl that you always used to look," he answered, "only you have grown very pretty, and it is not possible that I shall like you more than I used to."

"I think they must teach you to pay compliments at Oxford, Philip," she answered, flushing with pleasure,

"but it is all rubbish for you to say that I am pretty, because I know I am not"—and then, confidentially, glancing round to see that there was nobody within hearing (Hilda was engaged with a porter looking after her things): "Just look at my nose, and you will soon change your mind. It's broader, and flatter, and snubbier than ever. I consider that I have got a bone to pick with Providence about that nose. Ah! here comes Hilda. Isn't she lovely! There's beauty for you if you like. She hasn't got a nose. Come and show us to the carriage. You will ride over and lunch with us to-morrow, won't you? I am so glad to get back to the old house again; and I mean to have such a garden! 'Life is short, and joys are fleeting,' as Aunt Chambers always says, so I mean to make the best of it whilst it lasts. I saw your father yesterday. He is a dear old man, though he has such awful eyes. I never felt so happy in my life as I do now. Good-bye. One o'clock." And she was gone, leaving Philip with something to think about.

Philip's reception at home was cordial and reassuring. He found his father considerably aged in appearance, but as handsome and upright as ever, and to all appearance heartily glad to see him.

"I am glad to see you back, my boy," he said. "You come to take your proper place. If you look at me, you will see that you won't have long to wait before you take mine. I can't last much longer, Philip, I feel that. Eighty-two is a good age to have reached. I have had my time, and put the property in order, and now I suppose that I must make room. I went with the clerk, old Jakes, and marked out my grave yesterday. There's a nice little spot the other side of the stone which they

say marks where old yeoman Caresfoot, who planted Caresfoot's Staff, laid his bones, and that's where I wish to be put, in his good company. Don't forget that when the time comes, Philip. There's room for another if you care to keep it for yourself, but perhaps you will prefer the vault."

"You must not talk of dying yet, father. You will live many years yet."

"No, Philip; perhaps one, perhaps two, not more than two; perhaps a month, perhaps not a day. My life hangs on a thread now." And he pointed to his heart. "It may snap any day if it gets a strain. By the way, Philip, you see that cupboard? Open it! Now, you see that stoppered bottle with the red label? Good. Well now, if ever you see me taken with an attack of the heart (I have had one since you were away, you know, and it nearly carried me off), you run for that as hard as you can go, and give it me to drink, half at a time. It is a tremendous restorative of some sort, and old Caley says that, if I do not take it when the next attack comes, there'll be an end of 'Devil Caresfoot';" and he rapped his cane energetically on the oak floor.

"And so, Philip, I want you to go about and make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the property, so that you may be able to take things over when I die without any hitch. I hope that you will be careful and do well by the land. Remember that a big property like this is a sacred trust.

"And now there are two more things which I will take this opportunity to say a word to you about. First, I see that you and your cousin George don't get on well, and it grieves me. You have always had a false idea of George, always, and thought that he was underhand.

Nothing could be more mistaken than such a notion. George is a most estimable young man, and my dear brother's only son. I wish you would try to remember this, Philip—blood is thicker than water, you know—and you will be the only two Caresfoots left when I am gone. Now, perhaps you may think that I intend enriching George at your expense, but that is not so. Take this key and open the top drawer of the secretaire, and give me that bundle. This is my will. If you care to look over it, and can understand it—which is more than I can —you will see that everything is left to you, with the exception of that outlying farm at Holston, those three Essex farms that I bought two years ago, and twelve thousand pounds in cash. Of course, as you know, the Abbey House, and the lands immediately round, are entailed—it has always been the custom to entail them for many generations. There, put it back. And now the last thing is, I want you to get married, Philip. I should like to see a grandchild in the house before I die. I want you to marry Maria Lee. I like the girl. She comes of a good old Marlshire stock—our family married into hers in the year 1703. Besides, her property would put yours into a ring-fence. She is a sharp girl too, and quite pretty enough for a wife. I hope you will think it over, Philip."

"Yes, father; but perhaps she will not have me. I am going to lunch there to-morrow."

"I do not think you need be afraid, Philip; but I won't keep you any longer. Shake hands, my boy. You'll perhaps think of your old father kindly when you come to stand in his shoes. I hope you will, Philip. We have had many a quarrel, and sometimes I have been wrong, but I have always wished to do my duty by you, my boy.

Don't forget to make the best of your time at lunch to-morrow."

Philip went out of his father's study considerably touched by the kindness and consideration with which he had been treated, and not a little relieved to find his position with reference to his succession to the estate so much better than he had anticipated, and his cousin George's so much worse.

"That red-haired fox has plotted in vain," he thought, with secret exultation. And then he set himself to consider the desirability of falling in with his father's wishes as regarded marriage. Of Maria he was, as the reader is aware, very fond; indeed, a few years before he had been in love with her, or something like it; he knew too that she would make him a very good wife, and the match was one that in every way commended itself to his common sense and his interests. Yes, he would certainly take his father's advice. But every time he said this to himself—and he said it pretty often that evening—there would arise before his mind's eye a vision of the sweet blue eyes of Miss Lee's stately companion. What eyes they were, to be sure! It made Philip's blood run warm and quick merely to think of them; indeed, he could almost find it in his heart to wish that Hilda was Maria and Maria was in Hilda's shoes.

What between thoughts of the young lady he had set himself to marry, and of the young lady he did not mean to marry, but whose eyes he admired, Philip did not sleep so well as usual that night.

CHAPTER V.

THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA.

PHILIP did not neglect to go to luncheon at Rewtham House, and a very pleasant luncheon it was; indeed, it would have been difficult for him to have said which he found the pleasantest: Maria's cheerful chatter and flattering preference, or Hilda's sweet and gracious presence.

After luncheon, at Maria's invitation he gave Fräulein von Holtzhausen her first lesson in writing in English character; and to speak truth he found the task of guiding her fair hand through the mysteries of the English alphabet a by no means uncongenial occupation. When he came away his admiration of Hilda's blue eyes was more pronounced than ever; but, on the other hand, so was his conviction that he would be very foolish if he allowed it to interfere with his intention of making Maria Lee his wife.

He who would drive two women thus in double harness must needs have a light hand and a ready lash, and it is certainly to the credit of Philip's cleverness that he managed so well as he did. For as time went on he discovered his position to be this. Both Hilda and Maria were in love with him, the former deeply and silently, the latter openly and ostensibly. Now, however gratifying this fact might be to his pride, it was in some ways a thorny discovery, since he dared not visibly pay his attentions to either. For his part he returned Hilda von Holtzhausen's devotion to a degree that surprised himself; his passion for her burnt him like a fire, utterly searing away the traces of his former affection for Maria Lee. Under these circumstances, most young men of twenty-one would have thrown prudence to the winds and

acknowledged, either by acts or words, the object of their love; but not so Philip, who even at that age was by no means deficient in the characteristic caution of the Caresfoot family. He saw clearly that his father would never consent to his marriage with Hilda, nor, indeed, did he himself at all like the idea of losing Miss Lee and her estates.

On the other hand, he knew Hilda's proud and jealous mind. She was no melting beauty who would sigh and submit to an affront, but, for all her gracious ways, at heart a haughty woman, who, if she reigned at all, would reign like Alexander, unrivalled and alone. That she was well aware of her friend's tendresse for Philip the latter very shortly guessed; indeed, as he suspected, Maria was in the habit of confiding to her all her hopes and fears connected with himself, a suspicion that made him very careful in his remarks to that young lady.

The early summer passed away whilst Philip was still thinking over his position, and the face of the country was blushing with all the glory of July, when one afternoon he found himself, as he did pretty frequently, in the shady drawing-room at Miss Lee's. As he entered, the sound of voices told him that there were other visitors beside himself, and, as soon as his eyes had grown accustomed to light, he saw his cousin George, together with his partner Mr. Bellamy, and a lady with whom he was not acquainted.

George had improved in appearance somewhat since we last saw him meeting with severe treatment at his cousin's hands. The face had filled up a little, with the result that the nose did not look so hooked, nor the thick lips so coarse and sensual. The hair, however, was as red as ever, and as for the small, light-blue eyes, they

twinkled with the added sharpness and lustre that four years of such experience of the shady side of humanity as can be gathered in a lawyer's office, is able to give to the student of men and manners.

So soon as Philip had said how-do-you-do to Maria and Hilda, giving to each a gentle pressure of the hand, George greeted him with warmth.

"How are you, Philip? delighted to see you; how is my uncle? Bellamy saw him this morning, and thought that he did not look well."

"I certainly did think, Mr. Philip," said the gentleman alluded to, a very young-looking, apple-faced little man, with a timid manner, who stood in the background nervously rubbing his dry hands together—"I certainly did think that the squire looked aged when I saw him this morning."

"Well, you see, Mr. Bellamy, eighty-two is a good age, is it not?" said Philip, cheerfully.

"Yes, Mr. Philip, a good age, a very good age, for the *next heir,*" and Mr. Bellamy chuckled softly somewhere down in his throat, and retreated a little.

"Bellamy is getting facetious," broke in George, "that marriage has done that for him. By the way, Philip, do you know Mrs. Bellamy? she has only been down here a fortnight, you know. What, no! Then you have a pleasure to come" (raising his voice a little so that it might be heard at the other end of the room), "a very clever woman, and as handsome as she is clever."

"Indeed! I must ask you to introduce me presently, Mr. Bellamy," said Philip. "I only recently heard that you were married."

Mr. Bellamy blushed and twisted and was about to speak, when George cut in again.

"No, I dare say you didn't: sly dog, Bellamy; do you know what he did? I introduced him to the lady when we were up in town together last Christmas. I was dreadfully hard hit myself, I can assure you, and as soon as my back was turned he went and cut me out of the water—and turned my adored into Mrs. Bellamy."

"What are you taking my name in vain about, Mr. Caresfoot?" said a rich, low voice behind them.

"Bless me, Anne, how softly you move, you quite startled me," said little Mr. Bellamy, putting on his spectacles in an agitated manner.

"My dear, a wife, like an embodied conscience, should always be at her husband's shoulder, especially when he does not know it."

Bellamy made no reply, but looked as though the sentiment was one of which he did not approve; meantime the lady repeated her question to George, and the two fell into a bantering conversation. Philip, having dropped back a little, had an opportunity of carefully observing Mrs. Bellamy, an occupation not without interest, for she was certainly worthy of notice.

About twenty years of age, and of medium height, her figure was so finely proportioned and so roomily made that it gave her the appearance of being taller than she really was. The head was set squarely on the shoulders, the hair was cut short, and clustered in ringlets over the low, broad brow; whilst the clearly carved Egyptian features and square chin gave the whole face a curious expression of resoluteness and power. The eyes were heavily-lidded and greyish-green in hue, with enormously large dark pupils that had a strange habit of expanding and contracting without apparent reason.

Gazing at her, Philip was at a loss to know whether

this woman, so bizarrely beautiful, fascinated or repelled him; indeed, neither then nor at any future time did he succeed in deciding the question. Whilst he was still contemplating, and wondering how Bellamy of all people in the world had managed to marry such a woman, and what previous acquaintance George had had with her, he saw the lady whisper something to his cousin, who at once turned and introduced him.

"Philip," he said, "let me introduce you to the most charming lady of my acquaintance, Mrs. Bellamy."

Philip bowed and expressed himself delighted, whilst the lady curtsied with a mixture of grace and dignity that became her infinitely well.

"Your cousin has often spoken to me of you, Mr. Caresfoot, but he never told me——" here she hesitated, and broke off.

"What did he never tell you, Mrs. Bellamy? Nothing to my disadvantage, I hope."

"On the contrary, if you wish to know," she said, in that tone of flattering frankness which is sometimes so charming in a woman's mouth, "he never told me that you were young and handsome. I fancied you forty at least."

"I should dearly like to tell you, Mrs. Bellamy, what my cousin George never told *me;* but I won't, for fear I should make Bellamy jealous."

"Jealousy, Mr. Caresfoot, is a luxury that *my* husband is not allowed to indulge in; it is very well for lovers, but what is a compliment in a lover becomes an impertinence in a husband. But if I keep you here much longer, I shall be drawing the enmity of Miss Lee, and —yes, of Fräulein von Holtzhausen, too, on to my devoted head, and, as that is the only sort of jealousy I have any fear of, or indeed any respect for, being as it is the

expression of the natural abhorrence of one woman for another, I had rather avoid it."

Philip followed the direction of her sleepy eyes, and saw that both Miss Lee and Hilda appeared to be put out. The former was talking absently to Mr. Bellamy, and glancing continually in the direction of that gentleman's wife. The latter, too, whilst appearing to listen to some compliment from George, was gazing at Mrs. Bellamy with a curious look of dislike and apprehension on her face.

"You see what I mean; Fräulein von Holtzhausen actually looks as though she were afraid of me. Can you fancy any one being afraid of me, except my husband, of course?—for as you know, when a woman is talking of men, her husband is *always* excepted. Come, we must be going; but, Mr. Caresfoot, bend a little nearer; if you will accept it from such a stranger, I want to give you a bit of advice—make your choice pretty soon, or you will lose them both."

"What do you mean—how do you know——"

"I mean nothing at all, or just as much as you like, and for the rest I use my eyes. Come, let us join the others."

A few minutes later Hilda put down her work, and, declaring that she felt hot, threw open the French window and went out into the garden, whither, on some pretext or other, Philip followed her.

"What a lovely woman that is," said Mrs. Bellamy, with enthusiasm, to Miss Lee, so soon as Philip was out of earshot. "Her *tout ensemble* positively kills one. I feel plain and dowdy as a milkmaid alongside of a Court-beauty when I am in the room with her. Don't you, Miss Lee?"

"Oh, I don't know, I never thought about it; but of course she is lovely and I'm plain, so there is no possibility of a comparison between us."

"Well, I think you rate yourself rather low, if you will allow me to say so; but most women would but 'poorly satisfy the sight' of a man when she was present. I know that I should not care to trust my admirer (if I had one), however devoted he might be, for one single day in her company; would you?"

"I really don't know; what *do* you mean?"

"Mean, Miss Lee, why I mean nothing at all; what should I mean, except that beauty is a magnet which attracts all men; it serves them for a standard of morality and a test of right and wrong. Men are different from women. If a man is faithful to one of us, it is only because no other woman of sufficient charm has come between him and her. You can never trust a man."

"What dreadful ideas you have."

"Do you think so? I hope not. I only speak what I have observed. Take the case of Fräulein von Holtzhausen, for instance. Did you not notice that whilst she was in the room the eyes of those three gentlemen were all fixed upon her, and as soon as she leaves it one of them follows her, as the others would have done had they not been forestalled? One cannot blame them; they are simply following a natural law. Any other man would do the same where such a charming person is concerned."

"I certainly did not notice it; indeed, to speak the truth, I thought that they were more occupied with you——"

"With me! why, my dear Miss Lee, *I* don't set up for being good-looking. What a strange idea. But I dare say you are right, it is only one of my theories based

upon my own casual observations, and, after all, men are not a very interesting subject, are they? Let's talk of something more exciting—dresses, for instance."

But poor Maria was too uncomfortable and disturbed to talk of anything else, so she collapsed into silence, and shortly after Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy and George made their adieux.

Meanwhile Philip and Hilda had been walking leisurely down the shrubberies adjoining the house.

"Why have you come out?" she asked in German, a language which he understood well.

"To walk with you. Why do you speak to me in German?"

"Because it is my pleasure to do so, and I never asked you to walk with me. You are wanted in the drawing-room, you had better go back."

"No, I won't go, Hilda; that is, not until you have promised me something."

"Do not call me Hilda, if you please. I am the Fräulein von Holtzhausen. What is it you want me to promise?"

"I want you to meet me this evening at nine o'clock in the summer-house."

"I think, Mr. Caresfoot, that you are forgetting a little what is due to me, to yourself, and—to Miss Lee."

"What do you mean by due to Miss Lee?"

"Simply that she is in love with you, and that you have encouraged her in her affection; you need not contradict me, she tells me all about it."

"Nonsense, Hilda; if you will meet me to-night, I will explain everything; there is no need for you to be jealous."

She swept round upon him, tossing her head, and stamping her dainty foot upon the gravel.

"Mr. Caresfoot," she said, "once and for all I am not jealous, and I will not meet you; I have too much respect for myself, and too little for you," and she was gone.

Philip's face, as he stood looking after her, was not pleasant to see; it was very hard and angry.

"Jealous, is she? I will give her something to be jealous for, the proud minx;" and in his vexation he knocked off the head of a carnation with his stick.

"Philip, what *are* you doing? Those are my pet Australian carnations; at least, I think they are Australian. How can you destroy them like that?"

"All right, Maria; I was only plucking one for you. Won't you put it in your dress? Where are the others?"

"They have all gone. Come in, it is so hot out there; and tell me what you think of Mrs. Bellamy."

"I think that she is very handsome and very clever. I wonder where Bellamy picked her up."

"I don't know; I wish he hadn't picked her up at all. I don't like her, she says unpleasant things; and, though I have only seen her three times, she seems to know all about me and everybody else. I am not very quick; but do you know just now I thought that she was insinuating that you were in love with Hilda; that's not true, is it, Philip? Don't think me forward if I ask you if that is true, and if I say that, if it is, it is better I should know it. I shan't be angry, Philip;" and the girl stood before him to await his answer, one hand pressed against her bosom to still the beating of her heart, whilst with the other she screened her blushing brow.

And Philip, too, stood face to face with her sweet self, with conscience, and with opportunity. "Now," whispered conscience, "is the time, before very much harm is done; now is the acceptable time to tell her all

about it, and, whilst forbidding her love, to enlist her sympathy and friendship. It will be wrong to encourage her affection; when you ardently love another woman, you cannot palter any more." "Now," whispered opportunity, shouldering conscience aside, "is the time to secure her, her love, and her possessions, and to reward Hilda for her pride. Do not sacrifice yourself to an infatuation; do not tell her about Hilda—it would only breed jealousies; you can settle with her afterwards. Take the goods the gods provide you."

All this and more passed through his mind; and he had made his choice long before the rich blood that mantled in the lady's cheek had sunk back to the true breast from whence it came.

Oh, instant of time born to colour all eternity to your own hue—oh, fleeting moment, bearing desolation or healing on your wings, for this man you have come and gone!

Philip took her hand, the hand that was pressed upon her bosom.

"Maria," he said, "you should not get such ideas into your head. I admire Hilda very much, and that is all. Why, dear, I have always looked upon myself as half engaged to you—that is, so far as I am concerned; and I have only been waiting till circumstances would allow me to do so, to ask you if you think me worth marrying."

For a while she made no reply, but only blushed the more; at last she looked up a little.

"You have made me very happy, Philip." That was all she said.

"I am very glad, dear, that you can find anything in me to like; but if you do care for me, and think me worth waiting for, I am going to ask something of your

affection: I am going to ask you to trust me as well as to love me. I do not, for reasons that I will not enter into, but which I beg you to believe are perfectly straightforward, wish anything to be said of our engagement at present, not even to your friend Hilda. Do you trust me sufficiently to agree to that?"

"Philip, I trust you as much as I love you, and for years I have loved you with all my heart. And now, dear, please go; I want to think."

In the hall a servant gave him a note; it was from Hilda, and ran thus—

"I have changed my mind. I will meet you in the summer-house this evening. I have something to say to you."

Philip whistled as he read it.

"Devilish awkward," he thought to himself; "if I am going to marry Maria, Hilda must leave this. But I cannot bear to part with her. I love her! I love her!"

CHAPTER VI.

POOR MARIA!

It was some time before Philip could make up his mind whether or not he would attend his tryst with Hilda. In the first place, he felt that it was an unsafe proceeding generally, inasmuch as moonlight meetings with so lovely a person might, should they come to the knowledge of Miss Lee, be open to misconstruction; and particularly because, should she show the least tenderness towards him, he knew in his heart that he could not trust himself, however much he might be engaged in another direction. At twenty-one the affections cannot be outraged with im-

punity, but have an awkward way of asserting themselves, ties of honour notwithstanding.

But as a rule, when in our hearts we wish to do anything, that thing must be bad indeed if we cannot find a satisfactory excuse for doing it; and so it was with Philip. Now, thought he to himself, would be his opportunity to inform Hilda of his relations with Maria Lee, and to put an end to his flirtation with her; for, ostensibly at any rate, it was nothing more than a very serious flirtation—that is to say, though there had been words of love, and even on her part a passionate avowal of affection, wrung in an unguarded moment from the depths of her proud heart, there had been no formal engagement. It was a thing that must be done, and now was the time to do it. And so he made up his mind to go.

But when, that night, he found himself in the appointed place, waiting for the coming of the woman he was about to discard, but whom he loved with all the intensity of his fierce nature, he began to view the matter in other lights, and to feel his resolution oozing from him. Whether it was the silence of the place that told upon his nerves, strained as they were with expectation —for silence, and more especially silence by night, is a great unveiler of realities,—or the dread of bitter words, or the prescience of the sharp pang of parting—for he knew enough of Hilda to know that, what he had to say once said, she would trouble him no more—whether it was these things, or whatever it was that affected him, he grew most unaccountably anxious and depressed. Moreover, in this congenial condition of his mind, all its darker and hidden characteristics sprang into a vigorous growth. Superstitions and presentments crowded in upon him. He peopled his surroundings with the shades of

intangible deeds that yet awaited doing, and grew afraid of his own thoughts. He would have fled from the spot, but he could not fly; he could only watch the flicker of the moonlight upon the peaceful pool beside him, and—wait.

At last Hilda came with quick and anxious steps, and, though but a few minutes before he had dreaded her coming, he now welcomed it eagerly. For our feelings, of whatever sort, when directed towards another person, are so superficial as compared with the intensity of our fears when we are terrified by calamity, or by the presence, real or fancied, of the unknown, that in any moment of emergency, more especially if it be of a mental kind, we are apt to welcome even our worst enemy as a drowning man welcomes a spar.

"At last," he said, with a sigh of relief. "How late you are, Hilda!"

"I could not get away. There were some people to dinner;" and then in a softened voice, "How pale you look? Are you ill?"

"No, only a little tired."

After this there was silence, and the pair stood facing one another, each occupied with their own thoughts, and each dreading to put them into words. Once Philip made a beginning of speech, but his voice failed him; the beating of his heart seemed to choke his utterance.

At length she leaned, as though for support, against the trunk of a pine-tree, in the boughs of which the night-breeze was whispering, and spoke in a cold clear voice.

"You asked me to meet you here to-night. Have you anything to say to me? No, do not speak; perhaps I had better speak first. I have something to say to you,

and what I have to say may influence whatever is in your mind. Listen; you remember what passed between us nearly a month ago, when I was so weak as to let you see how much I loved you?"

Philip bowed his head in assent.

"Very good. I have come here to-night, not to give you any lovers' meeting, but to tell you that no such words must be spoken again, and that I am about to make it impossible that they should be spoken either by you or by me. I am going away from here, *never,* I hope, to return."

"Going away!" he gasped. "When?"

Here was the very thing he hoped for coming to pass, and yet the words that should have been so full of comfort fell upon him cold as ice, and struck him into misery.

"When! why, to-morrow morning. A relation of mine is ill in Germany, the only one I have. I never saw him, and care nothing for him, but it will give me a pretext; and, once gone, I shall not return. I have told Maria that I must go. She cried about it, poor girl."

At these words, all recollection of his purpose passed out of Philip's mind; all he realised was that, unless he could alter her determination, he was about to lose the woman he so passionately adored, and whose haughty pride was to him in itself more charming than all Maria's gentle love.

"Hilda, do not go," he said, seizing her hand, which she immediately withdrew; "do not leave me. You know how I love you."

"And why should I not leave you, even supposing it to be true that you do love me? To my cost I love you, and am I any longer to endure the daily humiliation of seeing myself, the poor German companion who has

nothing but her beauty, put aside in favour of another whom I also love? You say you love me, and bid me stay; now, tell me what is your purpose towards me? Do you intend to try to take advantage of my infatuation to make me your mistress? It is, I am told, a common thing for such proposals to be made to women in my position, whom it would be folly for wealthy gentlemen to marry. If so, abandon that idea; for I tell you, Philip, that I would rather die than so disgrace my ancient name to gratify myself. I know that you money-loving English do not think very much of race unless the bearers of the name are rich; but we do; and, although you would think it a *mésalliance* to marry me, I, on the other hand, should not be proud of an alliance with you. Why, Philip, my ancestors were princes of royal blood when yours still herded the swine in these woods. I can show more than thirty quarterings upon my shield, each the mark of a noble house, and I will not be the first to put a bar sinister across them. Now, I have spoken plainly, indelicately perhaps, and there is only one more word to be said between us, and that word is *good-bye,*" and she held out her hand.

He did not seem to see it; indeed, he had scarcely heard the latter part of what she said. Presently he lifted his face, and it bore traces of a dreadful inward struggle. It was deadly pale, and great black rings had painted themselves beneath the troubled eyes.

"Hilda," he said, hoarsely, "don't go; I cannot bear to let you go. I will marry you."

"Think of what you are saying, Philip, and do not be rash. I do not wish to entrap you into marriage. You love money. Remember that Maria, with all her possessions, asks nothing better than to become your wife,

and that I have absolutely nothing but my name and my good looks. Look at me," and she stepped out into a patch of moonlight that found its way between the trees, and, drawing the filmy shawl she wore from her head and bare neck and bosom, stood before him in all the brightness of her beauty, shaded as it was, and made more lovely by the shadows of the night.

"Examine me very carefully," she went on, with bitter sarcasm, "look into my features and study my form and carriage, or you may be disappointed with your bargain, and complain that you have not got your money's worth. Remember, too, that an accident, an illness, at the best the passage of a few years, may quite spoil my value as a beautiful woman, and reflect, before I take you at your word."

Philip had sat or rather crouched himself down upon the log of a tree that lay outside the summer-house, and covered his face with his hand, as though this woman's loveliness was more than he could bear to look upon. Now, however, he raised his eyes and let them dwell upon her scornful features.

"I had rather," he said slowly—"I had rather lose my life than lose you; I love you so that I would buy you at the price even of my honour. When will you marry me?"

"What, have you made up your mind so quickly? Are you sure? Then,"—and here she changed her whole tone and bearing, and passionately stretched out her arms towards him,—"my dearest Philip, my life, my love, I will marry you when you will."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, if you like!"

"You must promise me something first."

"What is it?"

"That you will keep the marriage a complete secret, and bear another name until my father's death. If you do not, he will most probably disinherit me."

"I do not like your terms, Philip. I do not like secret marriages; but you are giving up much to marry me, so I suppose I must give up something to marry you."

"You solemnly promise that nothing shall induce you to reveal that you are my wife until I give you permission to do so?"

"I promise—that is, provided you do not force me to in self-defence."

Philip laughed.

"You need not fear that," he said. "But how shall we arrange about getting married?"

"I can meet you in London."

"Very well. I will go up early to-morrow, and get a licence, and then on Wednesday I can meet you, and we can be married."

"As you will, Philip; where shall I meet you?"

He gave her an address which she carefully noted down.

"Now," she said, "you must go, it is late. Yes, you may kiss me now. There, that will do, now go." In another minute he was gone.

"I have won the game," she mused; "poor Maria! I am sorry for her, but perhaps hers is the better part. She will get over it, but mine is a sad fate; I love passionately, madly, but I do not trust the man I love. Why should our marriage be so secret? He cannot be entangled with Maria, or she would have told me." And she stretched out her arms towards the path by which he had left her, and cried aloud, in the native tongue

that sounded so soft upon her lips, "Oh, my heart's darling! if I could only trust you as well as I love you, it is a happy woman that I should be to-night."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SQUIRE PAYS A VISIT.

NOTHING occurred to interfere with the plan of action decided on by Hilda and Philip; no misadventure came to mock them, dashing the Tantalus cup of joy to earth before their eyes. On the contrary, within forty-eight hours of the conversation recorded in the last chapter, they were as completely and irrevocably man and wife, as a special licence and the curate of a city church, assisted by the clerk and the pew-opener, could make them.

Then followed a brief period of such delirium as turned the London lodgings, dingy and stuffy as they were in the height of the hot summer, into an earthly paradise, a garden of Eden, into which, alas! the serpent had no need to seek an entrance. But, as was natural, when the first glory of realised happiness was beginning to grow faint upon their sky, the young couple turned themselves to consider their position, and found in it, mutually and severally, many things that did not please them. For Philip, indeed, it was full of anxieties, for he had many complications to deal with. First there was his secret engagement to Maria Lee, of which, be it remembered, his wife was totally ignorant, and which was in itself a sufficiently awkward affair for a married man to have upon his hands. Then there was the paramount need of keeping his marriage with Hilda as secret as the dead, to say nothing of the necessity of his living, for the most part, away from his wife. Indeed, his only

consolation was that he had plenty of money on which to support her, inasmuch as his father, from the date of his leaving Oxford, had made him an allowance of one thousand a year.

Hilda too soon discovered that she was not without her troubles. For one thing, her husband's fits of moodiness and fretful anxiety troubled her, and possessed as she was of a more than ordinary share of womanly shrewdness, led her to suspect that he was hiding something from her. But what chiefly vexed her proud nature was the necessity of concealment, and all its attendant petty falsehoods and subterfuges. It was not pleasant for Hilda Caresfoot to have to pass as Mrs. Roberts, and to be careful not to show herself in public places in the daytime, where there was a possibility of her being seen by any one who might recognise in her striking figure the lady who had lived with Miss Lee in Marlshire. It was not pleasant to her to be obliged to reply to Maria Lee's affectionate letters, full as they were of entreaty for her return, by epistles that must be forwarded to a country town in a remote district of Germany to be posted, and which were in themselves full of lies that, however white they might have seemed under all the circumstances, she felt in her conscience to be very black indeed. In short, there was in their union none of that sense of finality and of security, under ordinary circumstances, that is the distinguishing mark of marriage in this country; it partook rather of the nature of an illicit connection.

At the end of a fortnight of wedded bliss all these little things had begun to make themselves felt, and in truth they were but the commencement of evils. For, one afternoon, Philip, for the first time since his wedding,

tore himself away from his wife's side, and paid a visit to a club to which he had been recently elected. Here he found no less than three letters from his father, the first requesting his return, the second commanding it in exceptionally polite language, and the third—written in mingled anxiety and anger, which had just arrived—coolly announcing his parent's intention of at once setting detective officers to work to discover his whereabouts, should he not hear of him. From this letter it appeared, indeed, that his cousin George had already been despatched to London to look for him, and on reference to the hall porter he discovered that such a gentleman had already inquired for him several times.

Cursing his own folly in not having kept up some communication with his father, he made the best of his way back to his lodgings, to find Hilda waiting for him somewhat disconsolately.

"I am glad that you have come back, love," she said, drawing him towards her till his dark curls mingled with her own fair locks, and kissing him upon the forehead. "I have missed you dreadfully. I do not understand how I can have lived all these years without you."

"I am afraid, dear, that you will have to live without me for a while now; listen," and he read her the letters which he had just received.

She listened attentively till he had finished.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, with some anxiety in her voice.

"Do? why of course I must go home at once."

"And what am I to do?"

"Well, I don't know; I suppose that you must stop here."

"That will be pleasant for me, will it not?"

"No, dear, it will be pleasant neither for you nor me; but what can I do? You know the man my father is to deal with; if I stop here in defiance of his wishes, especially as he has been anxious about me, there is no knowing what might not happen. Remember, Hilda, that we have to deal with George, whose whole life is devoted to secret endeavours to supplant me. If I were to give him such an opportunity as I should by stopping away now, I should deserve all I got, or rather all I did not get."

Hilda sighed and acquiesced; had she been a softer-minded woman she would have wept and relieved her feelings, but she was not soft-minded. And so, before the post went out, he wrote an affectionate letter to his father, expressing his sorrow at the latter's anxiety and at his own negligence in not having written to him, the fact of the matter being, he said, that he had been taken up with visiting some of his Oxford friends and had not till that afternoon been near his club to look for letters. He would, however, he added, return on the morrow, and make his apologies in person.

This letter he handed to his wife to read.

"Do you think that will do?" he asked, when she had finished.

"Oh, yes!" she replied, with a touch of her old sarcasm, "it is a masterpiece of falsehood."

Philip looked very angry, and fumed and fretted; but he made no reply, and on the following morning he departed to Bratham Abbey.

"Ah, Philip, Philip!" said his father, under the mellow influence of his fourth glass of port, on the night of his arrival. "I know well enough what kept you up in town. Well, well, I don't complain, young men will be young men; but do not allow these affairs to interfere with the

business of life. Remember Maria Lee, my boy; you have serious interests in that direction, interests that must not be trifled with, interests which I have a right to expect you will *not* trifle with."

His son made no reply, but sipped his wine in silence, aching at heart for his absent bride, and wondering what his father would say did he really know what had "kept him in town."

After this, matters went on smoothly enough for a month or more; since, fortunately for Philip, the great Maria Lee question, a question that the more he considered it the more thorny did it appear, was for the moment shelved by the absence of that young lady on a visit to her aunt in the Isle of Wight. Twice during that month he managed, on different pretexts, to get up to London and visit his wife, whom he found as patient as was possible under the circumstances, but anything but happy. Indeed, on the second occasion, she urged on him strongly the ignominy of her position, and even begged him to make a clean breast of it to his father, offering to undertake the task herself. He refused equally warmly, and some sharp words ensued, to be, however, quickly followed by a reconciliation.

On his return from this second visit, Philip found a note signed "affectionately yours, Maria Lee," waiting for him, which announced that young lady's return, and begged him to come over to lunch on the following day.

He went—indeed he had no alternative but to go; and again fortune favoured him in the person of a diffident young lady who was stopping with Maria, and who never left her side all that afternoon, much to the disgust of the latter and the relief of Philip. One thing, however, he was not spared, and that was the perusal of

Hilda's last letter to her friend, written apparently from Germany, and giving a lively description of the writer's daily life and the state of her uncle's health, which, she said, precluded all possibility of her return. Alas! he already knew its every line too well; for, as Hilda refused to undertake the task, he had but a week before drafted it himself. But Philip was growing hardened in deception, and found it possible to read it from end to end, and speculate upon its contents with Maria without blush or hesitation.

But he could not always expect to find Miss Lee in the custody of such an obtuse friend; and, needless to say, it became a matter of very serious importance to him to know how he should treat her. It occurred to him that his safest course might be to throw himself upon her generosity and make a clean breast of it; but when it came to the point he was too weak thus to expose his shameful conduct to the woman whose heart he had won, and to whom he was bound by every tie of honour that a gentleman holds sacred.

He thought of the scornful wonder with which she would listen to his tale, and preferred to take the risk of greater disaster in the future to the certainty of present shame. In the end, he contrived to establish a species of confidential intimacy with Maria, which, whilst it somewhat mystified the poor girl, was not without its charms, inasmuch as it tended to transform the every-day Philip into a hero of romance.

But in the main Maria was ill-suited to play heroine to her wooer's hero. Herself as open as the daylight, it was quite incomprehensible to her why their relationship should be kept such a dark and mysterious secret, or why, if her lover gave her a kiss, it should be done with

as many precautions as though he were about to commit a murder.

She was a very modest maiden, and in her heart believed it a wonderful thing that Philip should have fallen in love with her—a thing to be very proud of; and she felt it hard that she should be denied the gratification of openly acknowledging her lover, and showing him off to her friends, after the fashion that is so delightful to the female mind.

But, though this consciousness of the deprivation of a lawful joy set up a certain feeling of irritation in her mind, she did not allow it to override her entire trust in and love for Philip. Whatever he did was no doubt wise and right; but, for all that, on several occasions she took an opportunity to make him acquainted with her views of the matter, and to ask him questions that he found it increasingly difficult to answer.

In this way, by the exercise of ceaseless diplomacy, and with the assistance of a great deal of falsehood of the most artistic nature, Philip managed to tide over the next six months; but at the end of that time the position was very far from improved. Hilda was chafing more and more at the ignominy of her position; Maria was daily growing more and more impatient to publish their engagement; and last, but by no means least, his father was continually speaking to him on the subject of Miss Lee, till at length he succeeded in wringing from Philip the confession that there existed some sort of understanding between Maria and himself.

Now, the old squire, a shrewd man of the world, was not slow to guess that what prevented this understanding from being openly acknowledged as an engagement was some entanglement on his son's part. Indeed, it had

recently become clear to him that London had developed strange attractions for Philip. That this entanglement could be marriage, however, was an idea that never entered into his head: he had too good an opinion of his son's commonsense to believe it possible that he would deliberately jeopardize his inheritance by marrying without his permission. But Philip's reticence and obstinacy annoyed him excessively. "Devil" Caresfoot was not a man accustomed to be thwarted; indeed, he had never been thwarted in his life, and he did not mean to be now. He had set his heart upon this marriage, and it would have to be a good reason indeed that could turn him from his purpose.

Accordingly, having extracted the above information, he said no more to Philip, but proceeded to lay his own plans.

That very afternoon he began to put them into action. At three o'clock he ordered the carriage and pair, a vehicle which was rarely used, giving special directions that the coachman should see that his wig was properly curled. Before now an ill-curled wig had been known to produce a very bad effect upon Mr. Caresfoot's nerves, and also upon its wearer's future prospects in life.

At three precisely the heavy open carriage, swung upon C-springs and drawn by two huge greys, drew up in front of the hall-door, and the squire, who was as usual dressed in the old-fashioned knee-breeches, and carried in his hand his gold-headed cane, stepped solemnly into it, and seated himself exactly in the middle of the back seat, not leaning back, as is the fashion of our degenerate days, but holding himself bolt upright. It is impossible to conceive any more imposing sight than this old gentleman presented thus seated, and moving at a

stately pace through the village street; but it so oppressed the very children that fear at the spectacle, an unwonted one, for the squire had not thus driven abroad in state for some years, overcame their curiosity, and at his approach they incontinently fled.

So soon as the carriage had passed through the drive-gates of the Abbey, the squire ordered the coachman to drive to Rewtham House, whither he safely arrived in due course.

He was ushered into the drawing-room, whilst a servant went in search of Miss Lee, whom she found walking in the garden.

"A gentleman to see you, miss."

"I am not at home. Who is it?"

"Mr. Caresfoot, miss!"

"Oh, why didn't you say so before?" and taking it for granted that Philip paid her an unexpected visit, Maria started off for the house at a run.

"Why, Philip," she exclaimed, as she swung open the door, "this *is* good of you, o—oh!" for at that moment Mr. Caresfoot senior appeared from behind the back of the door where he had been standing by the fireplace, and made his most imposing bow.

"This, my dear Maria, is the first time that I have heard myself called Philip for many a long year, and I fear it was by accident; neither the name nor the blush were meant for me; now, were they?"

"I thought," replied Maria, who was still overwhelmed with confusion, "I thought that it was Philip, your son, you know; he has not been here for so long."

"With such a welcome waiting him, it is indeed wonderful that he can keep away;" and the old squire bowed again with so much courtly grace as to drive what little

self-possession remained to poor Maria after her flying entry entirely out of her head.

"And now, my dear," went on her visitor, fixing his piercing eyes upon her face, "with your permission, we will sit down and have a little talk together. Won't you take off your hat?"

Maria took off her hat, as suggested, and sat down meekly, full under fire of the glowing eyes that had produced such curious effects upon subjects so dissimilar as the late Mrs. Caresfoot and Jim Brady. She could, however, think of nothing appropriate to say.

"My dear," the old gentleman continued presently, "the subject upon which I have taken upon myself to speak to you is one very nearly affecting your happiness and is also of a delicate nature. My excuse for alluding to it must be that you are the child of my old friend—ah! we were great friends fifty years ago, my dear—and that I have myself a near interest in the matter. Do you understand me?"

"No, not quite."

"Well then, forgive an old man, who has no time to waste, if he comes to the point. I mean I have come to ask you, Maria, if any understanding or engagement exists between Philip and yourself?"

The eyes were full upon her now, and Maria felt that they were drawing her secret from her as a corkscrew does a cork. At last it came out with a pop.

"Yes, we are engaged."

"Thank you, my dear. How long have you been engaged?"

"About eight months."

"And why has the affair been kept so secret?"

"I don't know; Philip wished it. He told me not to

tell any one. I suppose that I should not by rights have told you."

"Make yourself easy, my dear. Philip has already told me that there was an understanding between you; I only wanted to hear the confirmation of such good news from your own lips. Young men are great coxcombs, my dear, and apt to fancy things where ladies are concerned. I am rejoiced to hear that there is no mistake on his part."

"I am so glad that you are pleased," she said, shyly.

"Pleased, my dear!" said the old gentleman, rising and walking up and down the room in his excitement, "pleased is not the word for it. I am more rejoiced than if some one had left me another estate. Look here, Maria, I had set my heart upon this thing coming to pass; I have thought of it for years. I loved your father, and you are like your father, girl; ay, I love you too, because you are a generous, honest woman, and will bring a good strain of blood into a family that wants generosity —yes, and I sometimes think wants honesty too. And then your land runs into ours, and, as I can't buy it, I am glad that it should come in by marriage. I have always wanted to see the Abbey, Isleworth, and Retham estates in a ring fence before I die. Come and give me a kiss, my dear."

Maria did as she was bid.

"I will try to be a good daughter to you," she said, "if I marry Philip; but," and here her voice trembled a little, "I want to make you understand that, though this engagement exists, I have sometimes thought of late that perhaps he wanted to break it off, and———"

"Break it off!" almost shouted the old man, his eyes flashing, "Break it off; by God, the day he plays fast and

loose with you, that day I leave the property to his cousin George;—there, there, I frightened you, I beg your pardon, but in his own interest, Maria, I advise you to hold him fast to his word. To change the subject, your news has freshened me up so much that I mean to have a little company; will you come and dine with me next Thursday?"

"I shall be very glad, Mr. Caresfoot."

"Thank you; and perhaps till then, unless he happens to ask you, you will not mention the subject of our conversation to Philip. I wish to have a talk with him first."

Maria assented, and the squire took his leave with the same magnificence of mien that had marked his arrival.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DINNER AND AFTER.

THAT evening his father astonished Philip by telling him that he intended to give a dinner-party on that day week.

"You see, Philip," he said, with a grim smile, "I have only got a year or so at the most before me, and I wish to see a little of my neighbours before I go. I have not had much society of late years. I mean to do the thing well while I am about it, and ask everybody in the neighbourhood. How many can dine with comfort in the old banqueting-hall, do you suppose?"

"About five-and forty, I should think."

"Five-and-forty! I remember that we sat down sixty to dinner when I came of age, but then we were a little crowded; so we will limit the number to fifty."

"Are you going to have fifty people to dinner?" asked Philip, aghast.

"Certainly; I shall ask you to come and help me to write the invitations presently. I have prepared a list; and will you kindly send over to Bell at Roxham? I wish to speak to him, he must bring his men over to do up the old hall a bit; and, by the way, write to Gunter's and order a man-cook to be here on Tuesday, and to bring with him materials for the best dinner for fifty people that he can supply. I will see after the wine myself; we will finish off that wonderful port my grandfather laid down. Now, bustle about, my lad, we have no time to lose; we must get all the notes out to-day."

Philip started to execute his orders, pretty well convinced in his own mind that his father was taking leave of his senses. Who ever heard of a dinner being given to fifty people before, especially in a house where such rare entertainments had always been of a traditionally select and solemn nature? The expense, too, reflected Philip, would be large; a man of his father's age had, in his opinion, no right to make such ducks-and-drakes of money that was so near to belonging to somebody else. But one thing was clear: his father had set his mind upon it, and when once that was the case, to try to thwart him was more than Philip dared.

When the notes of invitation arrived at their respective destinations, great was the excitement in the neighbourhood of Bratham Abbey. Curiosity was rampant on the point, and refusals were few and far between.

At length the eventful evening arrived, and with it the expected guests, amongst whom the old squire, with his snow-white hair and stately bearing, was himself by far the most striking figure, in his dress of a past generation —resplendent in diamond buckles, frilled shirt-front, and silk stockings.

Standing near the door of the large drawing-room, he received his guests as they arrived with an air that would have done credit to an ambassador; but when Miss Lee entered, Philip noticed with a prophetic shudder that, in lieu of the accustomed bow, he gave her a kiss. He also noticed, for he was an observant man, that the gathered company was pervaded by a curious air of expectation. They were nearly all of them people who had been neighbours of the Caresfoot family for years—in many instances for generations—and as intimate with its members as the high-stomached stiffness of English country-life will allow. They were, therefore, well acquainted with the family history and peculiarities; but it was clear from their faces that their knowledge was of no help to them now, and that they were totally in the dark as to why they were all gathered together in this unwonted fashion.

At length, to the relief of all, the last of the chosen fifty guests put in an appearance, and dinner was announced. Everybody made his way to his allotted partner, and awaited the signal to move forward, when a fresh piquancy was added to the proceedings by an unexpected incident—in which Maria Lee played a principal part. Maria was sitting in a corner of the drawing-room, wondering if Philip was going to take her in to dinner, and why he had not been to see her lately, when suddenly she became aware that all the room was looking at her, and on raising her eyes she perceived the cause. For there, close upon her, and advancing with majestic step and outstretched arm, was old Mr. Caresfoot, possessed by the evident intention of taking her down in the full face of all the married ladies of title present. She prayed that the floor might open and swallow her; indeed, of the two, she would have preferred that way of going down to

dinner. But it did not, so there was no alternative left to her but to accept the proffered arm, and, with as much dignity as she could muster in such a trying moment, in front of the intensely interested company—from which she could hear an involuntary murmur of surprise—to pass through the wide-flung doors, down the great oak staircase loaded with exotics, thence along a passage carpeted with crimson cloth, and through double doors of oak that were flung open at their approach, into the banqueting-hall. On its threshold not only she, but almost every member of the company who passed in behind them, uttered an exclamation of surprise; and indeed the sight before them amply justified it.

The hall was a chamber of noble proportions, sixty feet in length by thirty wide. It was very lofty, and the dark chestnut beams of the beautiful arched roof were thrown into strong relief by the light of many candles. The walls were panelled to the roof with oak that had become almost black in the course of centuries, here and there relieved by portraits and shining suits of armour. Down the centre of the room ran a long table, whereon, and on a huge side-board, was spread the whole of the Caresfoot plate, which, catching the light of the suspended candles, threw it back in dazzling gleams till the beholder was positively bewildered with the brilliancy of the sight.

"Oh, how beautiful!" said Maria, in astonishment.

"Yes," answered the old gentleman, as he took his seat at the head of the table, placing Maria on his right, "the plate is very fine, it has taken two hundred years to get together; but my father did more in that way than all of us put together, he spent ten thousand pounds on plate during his lifetime; that gold service on the side-board belonged to him. I have only spent two. Mind,

my love," he added in a low voice, "when it comes into your keeping that it is preserved intact; but I don't recommend you to add to it, there is too much already for a simple country gentleman's family."

Maria blushed and was silent.

The dinner, which was served on a most magnificent scale, wore itself away, as all big county-dinners do, in bursts of sedate but not profoundly interesting conversation. Indeed, had it not been for the novelty of the sight, Maria would have been rather bored, the squire's stately compliments notwithstanding. As it was, she felt inclined to envy the party at the other end, amongst whom, looking down the long vista of sparkling glass and silver, she could now and again catch sight of Philip's face beaming with animation, and even in the pauses of conversation hear the echo of his distant laughter.

"What good spirits he is in!" she thought to herself.

And, indeed, Philip was, or appeared to be, in excellent spirits. His handsome face, that of late had been so gloomy, was lit up with laughter, and he contrived by his witty talk to keep those round him in continual merriment.

"Philip seems very happy, doesn't he," said George, *sotto voce* to Mrs. Bellamy, who was sitting next to him.

"You must be a very bad judge of the face as an index to the mind if you think that he is happy. I have been watching him all dinner, and I draw a different conclusion."

"Why, look how he is laughing."

"Have you never seen a man laugh to hide his misery; never mind his lips, watch his eyes; they are dilated with fear, see how he keeps glancing towards his father and Miss Lee. There, did you see him start?

Believe me he is not happy, and unless I am mistaken he will be even less so before the night is over. We are not all asked here for nothing."

"I hope not, I hope not; if so we shall have to act upon our information, eh! But, to change the subject, you look lovely to-night."

"Of course I do, I *am* lovely: I wish I could return the compliment, but conscientiously I can't. Did you ever see such plate? look at that gold centre-piece."

"It is wonderful," said George. "I never saw it at all out before. I wonder," he added, with a sigh, "if I shall ever have the fingering of it."

"Yes," Mrs. Bellamy said, with a strange look of her large eyes, "if you continue to be guided by me, you shall. I tell you so, and I *never* make mistakes. Hush, something is going to happen. What is it?"

The dinner had come to an end, and in accordance with the old-fashioned custom the cloth had been removed, leaving bare an ancient table of polished oak nearly forty feet in length, and composed of slabs of timber a good two inches thick.

When the wine had been handed round, the old squire motioned to the servants to leave the room, and then, having first whispered something in the ear of Miss Lee that caused her to turn very red, he slowly rose to his feet in the midst of a dead silence.

"Look at your cousin's face," whispered Mrs. Bellamy. George looked; it was ghastly pale, and the black eyes were gleaming like polished jet against white paper.

"Friends and neighbours, amongst whom or amongst whose fathers I have lived for so many years," began the speaker, whose voice, soft as it was, filled the great hall with ease, "it was, if tradition does not lie, in this

very room and at this very table that the only Caresfoot who ever made an after-dinner speech of his own accord, delivered himself of his burden. That man was my ancestor in the eighth degree, old yeoman Caresfoot, and the occasion of his speech was to him a very important one, being the day on which he planted Caresfoot's Staff, the great oak by the water yonder, to mark the founding of a house of country gentry. Some centuries have elapsed since my forefather stood where I stand, most like with his hand upon this board as mine is now, and addressed a company not so fine or so well dressed, but perhaps—I mean no disrespect—on the whole, as good at heart as that before me. Yes, the sapling oak has grown into the biggest tree in the country-side 'twixt then and now. It seems, therefore, to be fit, that on what is to me as great a day as the planting of that oak was to my yeoman forefather, that I, like him, should gather my friends and neighbours round me under the same ancient roof that, like him, I may make them the partakers of my joy.

"None of you sitting at this board to-night can look upon the old man who now asks your attention, without realising what he himself has already learned: namely, that his day is over. Now, life is hard to quit. When a man grows old, the terrors of the unknown land loom just as large and terrible as they did to his youthful imagination, larger perhaps. But it is a fact that must be faced, a hard, inevitable fact. And age, realising this, looks round it for consolations, and finds only two; first, that as its interests and affections *here* fade and fall away, in just that same proportion do they grow and gather *there* upon the further shore; and secondly that, after Nature's eternal fashion, the youth and vigour of a

new generation is waiting to replace the worn-out decrepitude of that which sinks into oblivion. My life is done, it cannot be long before the churchyard claims its own, but I live again in my son: and take such cold comfort as I may from that idea of family, and of long-continued and assured succession, which has so largely helped to make this country what she is.

"But you will wonder what can be the particular purpose for which I have bidden you here to-night. Be assured that it was not to ask you to listen to gloomy sermons on the, to others, not very interesting fact of my approaching end, but rather for a joyful and a definite reason. One wish I have long had, it is—that before I go, I may see my son's child, the little Caresfoot that is to fill my place in future years, prattling about my knees. But this I shall never see. What I have to announce to you, however, is the first step towards it, my son's engagement to Miss Lee, the lady on my right."

"Look at his face," whispered Mrs. Bellamy to her neighbour, during the murmur of applause that followed this announcement. "Look quick."

Philip had put his hands down upon his chair as though to raise himself up, and an expression of such mingled rage and terror swept across his features as, once seen, could not easily be forgotten. But so quickly did it pass that perhaps Mrs. Bellamy, who was watching, was the only one in all that company to observe it. In another moment he was smiling and bowing his acknowledgments to whispered and telegraphed congratulations.

"You all know Miss Lee," went on the old squire, "as many of you knew her father and mother before her; she is a sound shoot from an honest stock, a girl

after my own heart, a girl whom I love, and whom all who come under her influence will love, and this engagement is to me the most joyful news that I have heard for many a year. May God, ay, and man too, so deal with my son as he deals with Maria Lee!

"And now I have done; I have already kept you too long. With your consent, we will have no more speeches, no returning of thanks; we will spare Philip his blushes. But before I sit down I will bid you all farewell, for I am in my eighty-third year, and I feel that I shall never see very many of your faces again. I wish that I had been a better neighbour to you all, as there are many other things I wish, now that it is too late to fulfil them; but I still hope that some of you will now and again find a kind thought for the old man whom among yourselves you talk of as 'Devil Caresfoot.' Believe me, my friends, there is truth in the ancient proverb: the devil is not always as black as he is painted. I give you my toast, my son Philip and his affianced wife, Maria Lee."

The whole company rose, actuated by a common impulse, and drank the health standing; and such was the pathos of the old squire's speech, that there were eyes among those present which were not free from tears. Then the ladies retired, amongst them poor Maria, who was naturally upset at the unexpected, and, in some ways, unwelcome notoriety thus given to herself.

In the drawing-room, she was so overwhelmed with congratulations, that, at last, feeling that she could not face a fresh edition from the male portion of the gathering, she ordered her carriage, and quietly slipped away home, to think over matters at her leisure.

Philip, too, came in for his share of honours down

below, and acknowledged them as best he might, for he had not the moral courage to repudiate the position. He felt that his father had forced his hand completely; that there was nothing to be done, and sank into the outward calmness of despair. But if his companions could have seen the whirlpool of hatred, terror, and fury that raged within his breast as he sat and chatted, and sipped his great-grandfather's port, they would have been justifiably astonished.

At length the banquet, for it was nothing less, came to an end, and, having bowed their farewell to the last departing guest, the old man and his son were left alone together in the deserted drawing-room. Philip was seated by a table, his face buried in his hand, whilst his father was standing by the dying fire, tapping his eye-glass nervously on the mantelpiece. It was he who broke the somewhat ominous silence.

"Well, Philip, how did you like my speech?"

Thus addressed, the son lifted his face from his hand; it was white as a sheet.

"By what authority," he asked, in a harsh whisper, "did you announce me as engaged to Miss Lee?"

"By my own, Philip. I had it from both your lips that you were engaged. I did not choose that it should remain a secret any longer."

"You had no right to make that speech. I will not marry Miss Lee; understand once and for all, I will *not* marry her."

In speaking thus, Philip had nerved himself to bear one of those dreadful outbursts of fury that had earned his father his title; but, to his astonishment, none such came. The steely eyes glinted a little as he answered in his most polite manner, and that was all.

"Your position, Philip, then is that you are engaged, very publicly engaged, to a girl whom you have no intention of marrying—a most disgraceful position; mine is that I have, with every possible solemnity, announced a marriage which will not come off—a most ridiculous position. Very good, my dear Philip; please yourself. I cannot force you into a distasteful marriage. But you must not suppose that you can thus thwart me with impunity. Allow me to show you the alternative. I see you are tired, but I shall not detain you long. Take that easy chair. This house and the land round it, also the plate, which is very valuable, but cannot be sold—by the way—see that it is safely locked up before you go to bed—are strictly entailed, and must, of course, pass to you. The value of the entailed land is about £1000 a year, or a little less in bad times; of the unentailed, a clear £4000; of my personal property about £900. Should you persist in your refusal to marry Miss Lee, or should the marriage in any way fall through, except from circumstances entirely beyond your control, I must, to use your own admirably emphatic language, ask you to 'understand, once and for all,' that, where your name appears in my will with reference to the unentailed and personal property, it will be erased, and that of your cousin George substituted. Please yourself, Philip, please yourself: it is a matter of entire indifference to me. I am fond of George, and shall be glad to do him a good turn if you force me to it, though it is a pity to split up the property. But probably you will like to take a week to consider whether you prefer to stick to the girl you have got hold of up in town there—oh, yes! I know there is some one—and abandon the property, or marry Miss Lee and retain the property—a very pretty problem

for an amorous young man to consider. There, I won't keep you up any longer. Good night, Philip, good night. Just see to the plate, will you? Remember, you have a personal interest in that; I can't leave it away."

Philip rose without a word and left the room, but when he was gone it was his father's turn to hide his face in his hands.

"Oh, God!" he groaned aloud, "to think that all my plans should come to such an end as this; to think that I am as powerless to prevent their collapse as a child is to support a falling tree; that the only power left me is the power of vengeance—vengeance on my own son! I have lived too long, and the dregs of life are bitter."

CHAPTER IX.

HILDA RECEIVES A LETTER.

Hilda found life in her London lodging anything but cheerful, and frequently begged Philip to allow her to settle somewhere in the country. This, however, he refused to do on two grounds; in the first place, because few country villages would be so convenient for him to get at as was London; and in the second, because he declared that the great city was the safest hiding-place in the world.

And so Hilda continued perforce to live her lonesome existence, that was only cheered by her husband's short and uncertain visits. Friends she had none, nor did she dare to make any. The only person whose conversation she could rely on to relieve the tedium of the long weeks was her landlady, Mrs. Jacobs, the widow of a cheesemonger, who had ruined a fine business by his drinking and other vicious propensities, and out of a good

property had only left his wife the leasehold of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, which, fortunately for her, had been settled upon her at her marriage. Like most people who have seen better days—not but what she was now very comfortably off—she delighted in talking of her misfortunes, and of the perfidiousness of man; and in Hilda, who, poor girl, had nothing else to listen to, she found a most attentive audience. As was only natural where such a charming person and such a good listener were concerned, honest Mrs. Jacobs soon grew fond of her interesting lodger, about whose husband's circumstances and history she soon wove many an imaginary tale; for, needless to say, her most pertinent inquiries failed to extract much information from Hilda. One of her favourite fictions was that her lodger was the victim of her handsome husband, who had in some way beguiled her from her home beyond the seas, in order to keep her in solitary confinement and out of the reach of a hated rival. Another was that he kept her thus that he might have greater liberty for his own actions.

In course of time these ideas took such possession of Mrs. Jacobs' mind that she grew to believe in them, and, when speaking of Hilda to any of her other lodgers, would shake her head and talk of her mysteriously as a "lamb" and a "victim."

As for that lady herself, whilst far from suspecting her good landlady's gloomy surmises, she certainly fell more and more a prey to depression and anxieties, and occasionally even to suspicion, to all of which evils she grew increasingly liable as she drew nearer to an event that was no longer very distant. She could not but notice a change in Philip's manner on the rare occasions when he was able to visit her, of which the most marked

developments were fits of silence and irritability. A certain reticence also, which became more and more noticeable as time went on, led her to feel that there was an invisible something growing up between them—a something that the pride she possessed in such a striking degree forbade her to attempt to pierce, but which was none the less galling to her on that account. Very shortly before the events narrated in the last chapter she had taken the occasion of a visit from Philip to complain somewhat bitterly of her position, begging him to tell her when there was any prospect of her being allowed to take her rightful place—a question her husband was quite unable to answer satisfactorily. Seeing that there was nothing to be got out of him, with womanly tact she changed the subject, and asked after Maria Lee (for whom she entertained a genuine affection)—when he last saw her, how she was looking, if there was any prospect of her getting married, and other questions of the same sort—the result of which was to evoke a most violent, and to her inexplicable, fit of irritability on the part of her husband. Something of a scene ensued, which was finally terminated about five o'clock in the afternoon by Philip's abrupt departure to catch his train.

Shortly afterwards Mrs. Jacobs, coming up to bring some tea, found Hilda indulging in tears that she had been too proud to shed before her husband; and, having had an extended personal experience of such matters, rightly guessed that there had been a conjugal tiff, the blame of which, needless to say, she fixed upon the departed Philip.

"Lor, Mrs. Roberts" (as Hilda was called), she said, "don't take on like that; they're all brutes, that's what they are; if only you could have seen my Samuel, who's

dead and gone these ten years and buried in a private grave at Kensal Cemetery—though he didn't leave anything to pay for it except three dozen and five of brandy—he was a beauty, poor dear, he was; your husband ain't nothing to him."

"My husband, let me tell you, Mrs. Jacobs, is not a brute at all," sobbed Hilda, with dignity.

"Ah, Mrs. Roberts, that is just what I used to say of Samuel, but he was the biggest brute in the three kingdoms, for all that; but if you ask me, meaning no offence, I call a man a brute as only comes to see his lawful wife about twice a month, let alone making an angel cry."

"Mr. Roberts has his reasons, Mrs. Jacobs; you must not talk of him like that."

"Ah, so my Samuel used to say when he stopped away from home for three nights at a time, till I followed him and found out his 'Reason,' and a mighty pretty 'Reason' she was too, all paint and feathers, the hussy, and eyes as big as a teacup. They all have their reasons, but they never tell 'em. But come and put on your things and go out a bit, there's a dear; it is a beautiful warm evening. You feel tired—oh, never mind that; it is necessary for people as is in an interested way to take exercise. I well remembers——"

Here Hilda, however, cut the subject short, and deprived herself of Mrs. Jacobs' reminiscences by going to put on her things.

It was a bright warm evening, and she found the air so pleasant that, after strolling round Lincoln's Inn Fields, she thought she would extend her walk a little, and struck past Lincoln's Inn Hall into New Square, and then made her way to the archway opposite to where the New Law Courts now stand. Under this archway a legal bookseller

had built his nest, and behind windows of broad plate-glass were ranged specimens of his seductive wares, baits on which to catch students avaricious of legal knowledge as they pass on their way to chambers or Hall. Now at this window a young man was standing at the moment that Hilda entered the archway, his eyes fixed upon a pamphlet on the laws of succession. That young man was George Caresfoot, who was considering whether it would be worth his while to buy the pamphlet in order to see if he would be entitled to anything if his uncle should happen to die intestate, as he sometimes feared might be the case. He had come up to town on business connected with his firm, and was now waiting till it was time to begin an evening of what he understood as pleasure; for George was a very gay young man.

He was, however, also a very sharp one, so sharp that he even noticed shadows, especially when, as in this case, the shadow was clearly defined and flung, life-sized, on the dark background of the books before him. He watched it for a moment, and as its owner, with an absent air, slowly passed from the bright sunlight into the shade of the arch, it struck the astute George that there was something familiar about this particular and by no means unpleasing shadow. Waiting till it had vanished and the footsteps gone past him, he turned round and at a glance recognised Hilda von Holtzhausen, Miss Lee's beautiful companion, who was supposed to have departed into the more distant parts of Germany. George's eyes twinkled, and a whole host of ideas rushed into his really able mind.

"Caught at last, for a sovereign," he muttered.

Meanwhile Hilda walked slowly on into Chancery Lane, then turned to the left till she came into Holborn, and thence made her way round by another route back

to Lincoln's Inn Fields. Needless to say, George followed at a respectful distance. His first impulse had been to go up and speak to her, but he resisted the inclination.

On the doorstep of the house where Hilda lodged, stood her landlady giving a piece of her mind to a butcher-boy, both as regarded his master's meat and his personal qualities. She paused for breath just as Hilda passed up the steps, and, turning, said something that made the latter laugh. The butcher-boy took the opportunity of beating a rapid retreat, leaving Mrs. Jacobs crowing after him from her own doorstep. As soon as Hilda had gone into the house, George saw his opportunity. Advancing politely towards Mrs. Jacobs, he asked her if she was the landlady of the house, and, when she had answered in the affirmative, he made inquiries about apartments.

"Thank you, sir," said Mrs. Jacobs, "but I do not let rooms to single gentlemen."

"You take too much for granted, ma'am. I am married."

She looked at him doubtfully. "I suppose, sir, you would have no objection to giving a reference?"

"A dozen, if you like, ma'am; but shall we look at the rooms?"

Mrs. Jacobs assented, and they made their way up-stairs, George keeping in front. On the first-floor he saw a pair of lady's shoes on a mat outside the door, and guessed to whom they belonged.

"Are these the rooms?" he said, laying his hand upon the door-handle.

"No, sir, no, they are Mrs. Roberts'; next floor, please, sir."

"Mrs. Roberts?—I suppose the very handsome young lady I saw come into the house. No offence, ma'am;

but a man's bound to be careful where he brings his wife. I suppose she's all right."

"Lord, yes, poor dear!" answered Mrs. Jacobs, in indignation; "why, they came here straight from St. Jude's, Battersea, the day they were married: a runaway match, I fancy."

"That's all right; she looked charming. I hope her husband is worthy of her," remarked George, as he gazed round Mrs. Jacobs' rooms.

"Well, as to that, he's handsome enough, for them as fancies those black men; but I don't like people as only comes to visit their lawful wives about twice a month. But," suddenly checking herself, "it isn't any affair of mine."

"No, indeed, very reprehensible: I am, as a married man, entirely of your mind. These are charming rooms, ma'am; charming. I shall certainly take them if my wife approves; I will let you know by to-morrow's post—Jacobs, yes, I have it down. Good evening, ma'am," and he was gone.

Instead of going out that evening as he had intended, George sat in the smoking-room of his hotel and thought. He also wrote a letter which he addressed to Mrs. Bellamy.

Next morning, taking a cab, he drove to St. Jude's, Battersea, and inspected the register.

Presently he asked for a certified copy of the following entry: "August 1, 1856. Philip Caresfoot, bachelor, gentleman, to Hilda von Holtzhausen, spinster (by license). Signed, J. Few, curate; as witness, Fred. Natt, Eliza Chambers."

That evening Hilda received an anonymous letter, written in a round clerk's hand, that had been posted in

the City. It was addressed to Mrs. Roberts, and its contents ran thus:

"A sincere friend warns Mrs. Philip Caresfoot that her husband is deceiving her, and has become entangled with a young lady of her acquaintance. *Burn this; wait and watch!*"

The letter fell from her hands as though it had stung her.

"Mrs. Jacobs was right," she said aloud, with a bitter laugh, "men always have a 'reason.' Oh, let him beware!" And she threw back her beautiful head and the great blue eyes sparkled like those of a snake about to strike. The sword of jealousy, that she had hitherto repelled with the shield of a woman's trust in the man she loves, had entered into her soul, and could Philip have seen her under these new circumstances, he would have realised that he had indeed good reason to "beware." "No wonder," she went on, "no wonder that he finds her name irritating upon my lips; no doubt to him it is a desecration. Oh, oh!" And she flung herself on her face, and wept tears of jealous rage.

"Well," said George to Mrs. Bellamy, as they drove home together after the great dinner party—let none be shocked, Bellamy was *on the box*—"well how shall we strike? Shall I go to the old man to-morrow, and show him my certified copy? There is no time to lose. He might die any day."

"No; we must act through Mrs. Philip."

"Why?"

"It is more scientific, and it will be more amusing."

"Poor thing! it will be a blow to her. Don't you like her?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because she did not trust me, and because she eclipses me. Therefore I am glad of an opportunity of destroying her."

"You are a very ruthless woman."

"When I have an end in view, I march straight to it; I do not vacillate—that is all. But never mind me; here we are near home. Go to town by the first train to-morrow morning and post another letter announcing what has happened here. Then come back and wait."

"Ah," reflected George, "that is a wonderful woman —a woman it is good to have some hold over."

We left Hilda stretched on her face sobbing. But the fit did not last long. She rose, and flung open the window; she seemed stifled for want of air. Then she sat down to think what she should do. Vanish and leave no trace? No; not yet. Appear and claim her place? No; not yet. The time was not ripe for choice between these two extremes. Upbraid Philip with his faithlessness? No; not without proofs. What did that hateful letter say? "Wait and watch;" yes, that was what she would do. But she could not wait here; she felt as though she must go somewhere, get some change of scene, or she should break down. She had heard Mrs. Jacobs speak of a village not more than two hours from London that a convalescent lodger of hers had visited and found charming. She would go there for a week, and watch the spring cast her mantle over the earth, and listen to the laughter of the brooks, and try to forget her burning love and jealousy, and just for that one week be happy as she was when, as a little girl, she roamed all day through the woods of her native Germany. Alas! she

forgot that it is the heart and not the scene which makes happiness.

That evening she wrote a note to her husband, saying she felt that change of air was necessary for her, and that she was going out of London for a few days, to some quiet place, from whence she would write to him. He must not, however, expect many letters, as she wanted complete rest.

On the following morning she went; and, if the sweet spring air did not bring peace to her mind, at any rate, to a very great extent, it set her up in strength. She wrote but one letter during her absence, and it was to say that she should be back in London by midday on the first of May. This letter reached Philip on the morning of the great dinner-party, and was either accidentally or on purpose sent without the writer's address. On the morning of the first of May—that is, two days after the dinner-party, which was given on the twenty-ninth of April—Hilda rose early, and commenced to pack her things with the assistance of a stout servant girl, who did all the odd jobs and a great deal of the work in the old-fashioned farmhouse in which she was staying. Presently the cowboy came whistling up the little garden, bright with crocuses and tulips, that lay in front of the house, and knocked at the front door.

"Lawks!" said the stout girl, in accents of deep surprise, as she drew her head in from the open lattice; "Jim's got a letter."

"Perhaps it is for me," suggested Hilda, a little nervously; she had grown nervous about the post of late. "Will you go and see?"

The letter was for her, in the handwriting of Mrs. Jacobs. She opened it; it contained another addressed

in a character the sight of which made her feel sick and faint. She could not trust herself to read it in the presence of the girl.

"Sally," she said, "I feel rather faint; I shall lie down a little. I will ring for you presently."

Sally retired, and she opened her letter.

Fifteen minutes after the girl received her summons. She found Hilda very pale, and with a curious look upon her face.

"I hope you're better, mum," she said, for she was a kind-hearted girl.

"Better—ah, yes! thank you, Sally; I am cured; quite cured; but please be quick with the things, for I shall leave by the nine o'clock train."

CHAPTER X.

DEVIL CARESFOOT AND HIS DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

THE night of the dinner-party was a nearly sleepless one for Philip, although his father had so considerately regretted his wearied appearance; he could do nothing but walk, walk, walk, like some unquiet ghost, up and down his great, oak-panelled bedroom, till, about dawn, his legs gave way beneath him; and think, think, think, till his mind recoiled, confused and helpless, from the dead wall of its objects. And, out of all this walking and thinking, there emerged, after an hour of stupor, that it would be a misnomer to call sleep, two fixed results. The first of these was that he hated his father as a lost soul must hate its torturing demon, blindly, madly, impotently hated him; and the second, that he could no longer delay taking his wife into his confidence. Then he remembered the letter he had received from her on

the previous morning. He got it, and saw that it bore no address, merely stating that she would be in London by midday on the first of May, which was on the morrow. Till then it was clear he must wait, and he was not sorry for the reprieve. His was not a pleasant story for a husband to have to tell.

Fortunately for Philip, there was an engagement of long standing for this day, the thirtieth of April, to go, in conjunction with other persons, to effect a valuation of the fallows, &c., of a large tenant who was going out at Michaelmas. This prevented any call being made upon him to go and see Maria Lee, as, after the events of the previous evening, it might have been expected he would. He started early on this business, and did not return till late, so he saw nothing of his father that day.

On the morning of the first of May he breakfasted about half-past eight, and then, without seeing his father, drove to Roxham to catch a train that brought him to London about twenty minutes to twelve. As he steamed slowly into Paddington Station, another train steamed out, and had he been careful to examine the occupants of the first-class carriages as they passed him in a slow procession, he might have seen something that would have interested him; but he was, not unnaturally, too much occupied with his own thoughts to allow of the indulgence of an idle curiosity. On the arrival of his train he took a cab and drove without delay to the house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and asked for Mrs. Roberts.

"She isn't back yet, sir," was Mrs. Jacobs' reply. "I got this note from her this morning to say that she would be here by twelve, but it's twenty past now, so I suppose that she has missed the train or changed her mind; but

there will be another in at three, so perhaps you had best wait for that, sir."

Philip was put out by this contretemps, but at the same time he was relieved to find that he had a space to breathe in before the inevitable and dreadful moment of exposure and infamy. For he had grown afraid of his wife.

Three o'clock came in due course, but no Hilda. Philip was seriously disturbed; but there was now no train by which she could arrive that day, so he was forced to the conclusion that she had postponed her departure. There were now two things to be done, one to follow her down to where she was staying—for he had ascertained her address from Mrs. Jacobs; the other, to return home and come back on the morrow. For reasons which appeared to him imperative, but which need not be entered into here, he decided on the latter course; so, leaving a note for his wife, he drove, in a very bad temper, to Paddington in time to catch the five o'clock train to Roxham.

Let us now return to the Abbey House, where, whilst Philip was cooling his heels in Lincoln's Inn Fields, a rather curious scene was in progress.

At one o'clock, old Mr. Caresfoot, as was his rule, sat down to lunch, which, frugal as it was, so far as he was concerned, was yet served with some old-fashioned ceremony by a butler and a footman. Just as the meal was coming to an end, a fly, with some luggage on it, drove up to the hall-door. The footman went to open it.

"Simmons," said the squire, to the old butler, "look out and tell me who that is."

Simmons did as he was bid, and replied:

"I don't rightly know, squire; but it's a lady, and she be wonderful tall."

Just then the footman returned, and said that a lady, who would not give her name, wished to speak to him in private.

"Are you sure the lady did not mean Mr. Philip?"

"No, sir; she asked for Mr. Philip first, and when I told her that he was out, she asked for you, sir. I have shown her into the study."

"Humph! at any rate she has come off a journey, and must be hungry. Set another place and ask her in here."

In another moment there was the rustle of a silk dress, and a lady, arrayed in a long cloak and with a thick veil on, was shown into the room. Mr. Caresfoot, rising with that courteous air for which he was remarkable, bowed and begged her to be seated, and then motioned to the servants to leave the room.

"Madam, I am told that you wish to speak to me; might I ask whom I have the honour of addressing?"

She, with a rapid motion, removed her hat and veil, and exposed her sternly beautiful face to his inquiring gaze.

"Do you not know me, Mr. Caresfoot?" she said, in her foreign accent.

"Surely, yes, you are the young lady who lived with Maria, Miss von Holtzhausen."

"That *was* my name, sir; it is now Hilda Caresfoot. I am your son Philip's wife."

As this astounding news broke upon his ears, her hearer's face became a shifting study. Incredulity, wonder, fury, all swept across it, and then in a single second it seemed to freeze. Next moment he spoke with overpowering politeness.

"So, madam; then I have to congratulate myself on the possession of a very lovely daughter-in-law."

A silence ensued that they were both too moved to break; at last, the old man said in an altered tone:

"We have much to talk of, and you must be tired. Take off your cloak, and eat whilst I think."

She obeyed him, and he saw that not only was she his son's wife, but that she must before long present the world with an heir to the name of Caresfoot. This made him think the more; but meanwhile he continued to attend to her wants. She ate little, but calmly.

"That woman has nerve," said he to himself.

Then he rang the bell, and bade Simmons wait till he had written a note.

"Send James to Roxham at once with this. Take this lady's things off the fly and put them in the red bedroom. By the way, I am at home to nobody except Mr. Bellamy;" and then, turning to Hilda, "Now, if you will come into my study, we will continue our chat," and he offered her his arm. "Here we are secure from interruption," he said with the ghost of a smile. "Take this chair. Now, forgive my impertinence, but I must ask you if I am to understand that you are my son's *legal* wife?"

She flushed a little as she answered:

"Sir, I am. I have been careful to bring the proof; here it is;" and she took from a little hand-bag a certified copy of the register of her marriage, and gave it to him. He examined it carefully through his good eye-glass, and handed it back.

"Perfectly in order. Hum! some eight months since, I see. May I ask why I am now for the first time favoured with a sight of this interesting document—in

short, why you come down, like an angel from the clouds, and reveal yourself at the present moment?"

"I have come," she answered, "because of these." And she handed him two letters. "I have come to ascertain if they are true; if my husband is a doubly perjured or a basely slandered man."

He read the two anonymous letters. With the contents of the first we are acquainted; the second merely told of the public announcement of Philip's engagement.

"Speak," she said, with desperate energy, the calm of her face breaking up like ice before a rush of waters. "You must know everything; tell me my fate!"

"Madam, these villainous letters are in every particular true. You have married in my son the biggest scoundrel in the county. I can only say that I grieve for you."

She listened in silence; then rising from her chair, said, with a gesture infinitely tragic in its simplicity:

"Then it is finished; before God and man I renounce him. Listen," she went on, turning to her father-in-law, "I loved your son, he won my heart; but, though he said he loved me, I suspected him of playing fast and loose with me, on the one hand, and with my friend, Maria Lee, on the other. So I determined to go away, and told him so. Then it was that he offered to marry me at once if I would change my purpose. I loved him, and I consented—yes, because I loved him so, I consented to even more. I agreed to pass by a false name, and to enter on a course of trickery in order to keep the marriage secret from you. You see what it has led to. I, a Von Holtzhausen, and the last of my race, stand here a by-word and a scorn; my story will be found amusing at every dinner-table in the country-side, and my shame will even cling to my unborn child. This is the return

he has made me for my sacrifice of self-respect, and for consenting to marry him at all; to outrage my love, and make me a public mockery."

"We have been accustomed," broke in the old squire, his pride somewhat nettled, "to consider our own a good family to marry into. You do not seem to share that view."

"Good; yes, there is plenty of your money for those who care for it; but, sir, as I told your son, it is not a *family*. He did me no honour in marrying me, though I was nothing but a German companion, with no dower but her beauty. I,"—and here she flung her head back with an air of ineffable pride—"did him the honour. My ancestors, sir, were princes when his were plough-boys."

"Well, well," answered the old squire, testily, "ten generations of country gentry, and the Lord only knows how many more of stout yeomen before them, is a good enough descent for us; but I like your pride, and I am glad that you spring from an ancient race. You have been shamefully treated, Hilda—is not your name Hilda?—but there are others, more free from blame than you are, who have been treated worse."

"Ah, Maria! then she knows nothing?"

"Yes, there is Maria and myself. But never mind that. Philip will, I suppose, be back in a few hours—oh, yes! he will be back," and his eyes glinted unpleasantly; "and what shall you do then! what course do you intend to take?"

"I intend to claim my rights, to force him to acknowledge me here where he suffered his engagement to another woman to be proclaimed, and then I intend to leave him. He has killed my respect; I will not live with him again. I can earn my living in Germany. I have done

with him; but, sir, do not you be hard upon him. It is a matter between me and him. Let him not suffer on my account."

"My dear, pray confine yourself to your own affairs, and leave me to settle mine. There shall be no harshness; nobody shall suffer more than they deserve. There, don't break down, go and rest, for there are painful scenes before you."

He rang the bell, and sent for the housekeeper. She came presently, a pleasant-looking woman of about thirty years of age, with a comely face and honest eyes.

"This lady, Pigott," said the old squire, addressing her, "is Mrs. Philip Caresfoot, and you will be so kind as to treat her with all respect. Don't open your eyes, but attend to me. For the present, you had best put her in the red room, and attend to her yourself. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I understand," Pigott replied, curtseying. "Will you be pleased to come along with me, ma'am?"

Hilda rose and took Pigott's arm. Excitement and fatigue had worn her out. Before she went, however, she turned, and with tears in her eyes thanked the old man for his kindness to a friendless woman.

The hard eyes grew kindly as he stooped and kissed the broad, white brow, and said in his stately way—

"My dear, as yet I have shown you nothing but the courtesy due to a lady. Should I live, I hope to bestow on you the affection I owe to a much-wronged daughter. Good-bye."

And thus they parted, little knowing where they should meet again.

"A woman I respect—well, English or German, the blood will tell"—he said as soon as the door had closed.

"Poor thing—poor Maria too! The scoundrel! ah! there it is again;" and he pressed his hand to his heart. "This business has upset me, and no wonder!"

The pang passed, and sitting down he wrote a letter that evidently embarrassed him considerably, and addressed it to Miss Lee. This he put in the post-box, and then going to a secretaire, he unlocked it, and taking out a document, he began to puzzle over it attentively.

Presently Simmons announced that Mr. Bellamy was waiting.

"Show him in at once," said the old man, briskly.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT PHILIP DID.

It was some minutes past seven that evening when the lawyer left, and he had not been gone a quarter of an hour before a hired gig drove up to the door containing Philip, who had arrived back from town in the worst of bad tempers, and, as no conveyance was waiting for him, had been forced to post over from Roxham. Apparently his father had been expecting his arrival, for the moment the servant opened the door he appeared from his study, and addressed him in a tone that was as near to being jovial as he ever went.

"Hallo, Philip, back again, are you! Been up to town, I suppose, and driven over in the 'George' gig? That's lucky; I wanted to speak to you. Come in here, there's a good fellow, I want to speak to you."

"Why is he so infernally genial?" reflected Philip. "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes;*" then aloud, "All right, father; but if it is all the same to you, I should like to get some dinner first."

"Dinner! why, I have had none yet; I have been too busy. I shall not keep you long; we will dine together presently."

Philip was surprised, and glanced at him suspiciously. His habits were extremely regular; why had he had no dinner?

Meanwhile his father led the way into the study, muttering below his breath—

"One more chance—his last chance."

A wood fire was burning brightly on the hearth, for the evening was chilly, and some sherry and glasses stood upon the table.

"Take a glass of wine, Philip; I am going to have one; it is a good thing to begin a conversation on. What says the Psalmist: 'Wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make him a cheerful countenance'—a cheerful countenance! Ho, ho! my old limbs are tired; I am going to sit down—going to sit down!"

He seated himself in a well-worn leather arm-chair by the side of the fire so that his back was towards the dying daylight. But the brightness of the flames threw the clear-cut features into strong relief against the gloom, and by it Philip could see that the withered cheeks were flushed. Somehow the whole strongly defined scene made him feel uncanny and restless.

"Cold for the first of May, isn't it, lad? The world is very cold at eighty-two. Eighty-two, a great age, yet it seems but the other day that I used to sit in this very chair and dandle you upon my knee, and make this repeater strike for you. And yet that is twenty years since, and I have lived through four twenties and two years. A great age, a cold world!"

"Aren't you well, father?" asked his son, brusquely, but not unkindly.

"Well; ah, yes! thank you, Philip, I never felt better, my memory is so good, I can see things I have forgotten seventy years or more. Dear, dear, it was behind that bookcase in a hole in the board that I hid my flint and steel which I used for making little fires at the foot of Caresfoot's Staff. There is a mark on the bark now. I was mischievous as a little lad, and thought that the old tree would make a fine blaze. I was audacious, too, and delighted to hide the things in my father's study under the very nose of authority. Ay, and other memories come upon me as I think. It was here upon this very table that they stood my mother's coffin. I was standing where you are now when I wrenched open the half-fastened shell to kiss her once more before they screwed her down for ever. I wonder would you do as much for me, Philip? I loved my mother, and that was fifty years ago. I wonder shall we meet again? That was on the first of May, a long-gone first of May. They threw branches of blackthorn bloom upon her coffin. Odd, very odd! But business, lad, business—what was it? ah! I know," and his manner changed in a second and became hard and stern. "About Maria, have you come to a decision?"

Philip moved restlessly on his chair, poked the logs to a brighter blaze, and threw on a handful of pine-chips from a basket by his side before he answered. Then he said—

"No, I have not."

"Your reluctance is very strange, Philip, I cannot understand it. I suppose that you are not already married, are you, Philip?"

There was a lurid calm about the old man's face as

he asked this question that was very dreadful in its intensity. Under the shadow of his thick black eyebrows, gleams of light glinted and flickered in the expanded pupils, as before the outburst of a tempest the forked lightning flickers in the belly of the cloud. His voice too was constrained and harsh.

Owing to the position of his father's head, Philip could not see this play of feature, but he heard the voice and thought that it meant mischief. He had but a second to decide between confession and the lie that leaped to his lips. An inward conviction told him that his father was not long for this world, was it worth while to face his anger when matters might yet be kept dark till the end? The tone of the voice—ah! how he mistook its meaning—deceived him. It was not, he thought, possible that his father could know anything. Had he possessed a little more knowledge of the world, he might have judged differently.

"Married, no, indeed; what put that idea into your head?" And he laughed outright.

Presently he became aware that his father had risen and was approaching towards him. Another moment and a hand of iron was laid upon his shoulder, the awful eyes blazed into his face and seemed to pierce him through and through, and a voice that he could not have recognised hissed into his ear—

"You unutterable liar, you everlasting hound, your wife is at this moment in this house."

Philip sprang up with an exclamation of rage and cursed Hilda aloud.

"No," went on his father, standing before him, his tall frame swaying backwards and forwards with excitement; "no, do not curse her, she, like your other poor

dupe, is an honest woman; on yourself be the damnation, you living fraud, you outcast from all honour, who have brought shame and reproach upon our honest name, on you be it; may every curse attend *you,* and may remorse torture *you.* Listen: you lied to me, you lied to your wife, trebly did you lie to the unfortunate girl you have deceived; but, if you will not speak it, for once hear the truth, and remember that you have to deal with one so relentless, that fools, mistaking justice for oppression, call him 'devil.' I, 'Devil Caresfoot,' tell you that I will disinherit you of every stick, stone, and stiver that the law allows me, and start you in the enjoyment of the rest with my bitterest curse. This I will do now whilst I am alive; when I am dead, by Heaven I will haunt you if I can."

Here he stopped for want of breath, and stood for a moment in the full light of the cheery blaze, one hand raised above his head as though to strike, and, presenting with his glittering eyes and working features, so terrible a spectacle of rage that his son recoiled involuntarily before him.

But fury begets fury as love begets love, and in another second Philip felt his own wicked temper boil up within him. He clenched his teeth and stood firm.

"Do your worst," he said; "I hate you; I wish to God that you were dead!"

Hardly had these dreadful words left his lips when a change came over the old man's face; it seemed to stiffen, and putting one hand to his heart he staggered back into his chair, pointing and making signs as he fell towards a little cupboard in the angle of the wall. His son at once guessed what had happened; his father had got one of the attacks of the heart to which he was sub-

ject, and was motioning to him to bring the medicine which he had before shown him, and which alone could save him in these seizures. Actuated by a common impulse of humanity, Philip for the moment forgot their quarrel, and stepped with all speed to fetch it. As it happened, there stood beneath this cupboard a table, and on this table lay the document which his father had been reading that afternoon before the arrival of Mr. Bellamy. It was his will, and, as is usual in the case of such deeds, the date was endorsed upon the back. All this Philip saw at a single glance, and he also saw that the will was dated some years back, and therefore one under which he would inherit; doubtless the same that his father had some months before offered to show him.

It flashed through his mind that his father had got it out in order to burn it; and this idea was followed by another that for a moment stilled his heart.

"*If he should die now he cannot destroy it!* If he does not take the medicine he *will* die."

Thought flies fast in moments of emergency. Philip, too, was a man of determined mind where his own interests were concerned, his blood was heated and his reason blinded by fury and terror. He was not long in settling on his course of action. Taking the bottle from the cupboard, he poured out its contents into one of the wine-glasses that stood upon the table, and coming up to his father with it addressed him. He knew that these attacks, although they were of a nature to cause intense pain, did not rob the sufferer of his senses. The old man, though he lay before him gasping with agony, was quite in a condition to understand him.

"Listen to me," he said, in a slow, distinct voice. "Just now you said that you would disinherit me. This

medicine will save your life, and if I let it fall you will die, and there is no more in the house. Swear before God that you will not carry out your threat, and I will give it to you. Lift up your hand to show me that you swear."

Silence followed, only broken by the gasps of the dying man.

"If you will not swear, I will pour it out before your eyes."

Again there was silence; but this time the old man made an effort to rise and ring the bell.

His son threw him roughly back.

"For the last time," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "will you swear?"

A struggle passed over his father's face, now nearly black with pain; and presently from the distended lips that did not seem to move, there burst a single word—destined to echo for ever in his son's ears—

"Murderer!"

It was his last. He sank back, groaned, and died; and at the same moment the flame from the pine-chips flickered itself away, and of a sudden the room grew nearly dark. Philip stood for a while aghast at his own handiwork, and watched the dull light glance on the dead white of his father's brow. He was benumbed by terror at what he had done, and in that awful second of realization would have given his own life to have it undone.

Presently, however, the instinct of self-preservation came to his aid. He lit a candle, and taking some of the medicine in the glass, smeared it over the dead man's chin and coat, and then broke the glass on the floor by his side—thus making it appear that he had died whilst attempting to swallow the medicine.

Next he raised a loud outcry, and violently rang the bell. In a minute the room was full of startled servants, one of whom was instantly despatched for Mr. Caley, the doctor. Meanwhile, after a vain attempt to restore animation, the study-table was cleared and the corpse laid on it, as its mother's had been on that day fifty years before.

Then came a dreadful hush, and the shadow of death fell upon the house and brooded over it. The men-servants moved to and fro with muffled feet, and the women wept, for in a way they had all loved the imperious old man, and the last change had come very suddenly. Philip's brain burned; he was consumed by the desire of action. Suddenly he bethought him of his wife upstairs; after what he had just passed through, no scene with her could disturb him—it would, he even felt, be welcome. He went up to the room where she was, and entered. It was evident that she had been told of what had happened, as both she and Pigott, who was undressing her—for she was wearied out—were weeping. She did not appear surprised at his appearance; the shock of the old man's death extinguished all surprise. It was he who broke the silence.

"He is dead," he said.

"Yes, I have heard."

"If you are at liberty for a few minutes, I wish to talk to you," he said savagely.

"I, too," she answered, "have something to say, but I am too weary and upset to say it now. I will see you to-morrow."

He turned and went without answering, and Pigott noticed that no kiss or word of endearment passed between them, and that the tone of their words was cold.

Soon after Philip got downstairs the doctor came.

Philip met him in the hall and accompanied him into the study, where the body was. He made a rapid examination, more as a matter of form than anything else, for his first glance had told him that life was extinct.

"Quite dead," he said sorrowfully; "my old friend gone at last. One of a fine sort too; a just man for all his temper. They called him 'devil,' and he was fierce when he was younger, but if I never meet a worse devil than he was I shall do well. He was very kind to me once—very. How did he go?—in pain, I fear."

"We were talking together, when suddenly he was seized with the attack. I got the medicine as fast as I could and tried to get it down his throat, but he could not swallow, and in the hurry the glass was knocked by a jerk of his head right out of my hands. Next second he was dead."

"Very quick—quicker than I should have expected. Did he say anything?"

"No."

Now, just as Philip delivered himself of this last lie, a curious incident happened, or rather an incident that is apt to seem curious to a person who has just told a lie. The corpse distinctly moved its right hand—the same that had been clasped over the old man's heart as he denounced his son.

"Good God!" said Philip, turning pale as death, "what's that?" and even the doctor started a little, and cast a keen look at the dead face.

"Nothing," he said. "I have seen this happen before when there has been considerable tension of the muscles before death; it is only their final slackening, that is all. Come, will you ring the bell? They had better come and take it upstairs."

This sad task had just been performed, and Mr. Caley was about to take his leave, when Pigott came down and whispered something into his ear that evidently caused him the most lively astonishment. Drawing Philip aside, he said—

"The housekeeper asks me to come up and see 'Mrs. Philip Caresfoot,' whom she thinks is going to be confined. Does she mean your wife?"

"Yes," answered Philip sullenly, "she does. It is a long story, and I am too upset to tell it you now. It will soon be all over the country, I suppose."

The old doctor whistled, but judged it advisable not to put any more questions, when suddenly an idea seemed to strike him.

"You said you were talking to your father when the fit took him; was it about your marriage?"

"Yes."

"When did he first know of it?"

"To-day, I believe."

"Ah, thank you;" and he followed Pigott upstairs.

That night, exactly at twelve o'clock, another little lamp floated out on the waters of life: Angela was born.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PASSING OF HILDA.

When the doctor had gone upstairs, Philip went into the dining-room to eat something, only to find that food was repugnant to him; he could scarcely swallow a mouthful. To some extent, however, he supplied its place by wine, of which he drank several glasses. Then, drawn by a strange fascination, he went back into the little study, and, remembering the will, bethought him-

self that it might be as well to secure it. In taking it off the table, however, a folded and much erased sheet of manuscript was disclosed. Recognizing Bellamy's writing, he took it up and commenced to read the draft, for it was nothing else. Its substance was as follows.

The document began by stating that the testator's former will was declared null and void on account of the "treacherous and dishonourable conduct of his son Philip." It then, in brief but sweeping terms, bequeathed and devised to trustees, of whom Philip was not one, the unentailed property and personalty to be held by them: firstly, for the benefit of any *son* that might be born to the said disinherited Philip by *his wife Hilda*—the question of daughters being, probably by accident, passed over in silence—and failing such issue, then to the testator's nephew, George Caresfoot, absolutely subject, however, to the following curious condition: Should the said George Caresfoot, *either by deed of gift or will,* attempt to reconvey the estate to his cousin Philip, or to descendants of the said Philip, then the gift over to the said George was to be of none effect, and the whole was to pass to some distant cousins of the testator's who lived in Scotland. Then followed several legacies and one charge on the estate to the extent of £1000 a year payable to the *separate* use of the aforesaid Hilda Caresfoot for life, and reverting at death to the holder of the estate.

In plain English, Philip was, under this draft, totally disinherited, first in favour of his own male issue, by his wife Hilda, all mention of daughters being omitted, and failing such issue, in favour of his hated cousin George, who, as though to add insult to injury, was prohibited from willing the property back either to himself or his

descendants, by whom the testator had probably understood the children of a second marriage.

Philip read the document over twice carefully.

"Phew!" he said, "that was touch and go. Thank heavens he had no time to carry out his kind intentions."

But presently a terrible thought struck him. He rang the bell hastily. It was answered by the footman, who, since he had an hour before helped to carry his poor master upstairs, had become quite demoralized. It was some time before Philip could get an answer to his question as to whether or not any one had been with his father that day whilst he was out. At last he succeeded in extracting a reply from the man that nobody had been except the young lady—"leastways, he begged pardon, Mrs. Caresfoot, as he was told she was."

"Never mind her," said Philip, feeling as though a load had been taken from his breast, "you are sure nobody else has been?"

"No, sir, nobody, leastways, he begged pardon, nobody except lawyer Bellamy and his clerk, who had been there all the afternoon writing, with a black bag, and had sent for Simmons to be witnessed."

"You can go," said Philip, in a quiet voice. He saw it all now, he had let the old man die *after* he had executed the fresh will disinheriting him. He had let him die; he had effectually and beyond redemption cut his own throat. Doubtless, too, Bellamy had taken the new will with him; there was no chance of his being able to destroy it.

By degrees, however, his fit of brooding gave way to one of sullen fury against his wife, himself, but most of all against his dead father. Drunk with excitement, rage, and baffled avarice, he seized a candle and staggered up

to the room where the corpse had been laid, launching imprecations as he went at his dead father's head. But when he came face to face with that dread Presence his passion died, and a cold sense of the awful quiet and omnipotence of death came upon him and chilled him into fear. In some indistinct way he realised how impotent is the chafing of the waters of Mortality against the iron-bound coasts of Death. To what purpose did he rail against that solemn quiet thing, that husk and mask of life which lay in unmoved mockery of his reviling?

His father was dead, and he, even he, had killed his father. He was his father's murderer. And then a terror of the reckoning that must one day be struck between that dead man's spirit and his own took possession of him, and a foreknowledge of the awful shadow under which he must henceforth live crept into his mind and froze the very marrow of his bones. He looked again at the face, and, to his excited imagination, it appeared to have assumed a sardonic smile. The curse of Cain fell upon him as he looked, and weighed him down; his hair rose, and the cold sweat poured from his forehead. At length he could bear it no longer, but, turning, fled out of the room and out of the house, far into the night.

When, haggard with mental and bodily exhaustion, he at length returned, it was after midnight. He found Dr. Caley waiting for him; he had just come from the sick-room and wore an anxious look upon his face.

"Your wife has been delivered of a fine girl," he said; "but I am bound to tell you that her condition is far from satisfactory. The case is a most complicated and dangerous one."

"A girl!" groaned Philip, mindful of the will. "Are you sure that it is a girl?"

"Of course I am sure," answered the doctor, testily.

"And Hilda ill—I don't understand."

"Look here, my good fellow, you are upset; take a glass of brandy and go to bed. Your wife does not wish to see you now, but, if necessary, I will send for you. Now, do as I tell you, or you will be down next. Your nerves are seriously shaken."

Philip did as he was bid, and, as soon as he had seen him off to his room, the doctor returned upstairs.

In the early morning he sent for two of his brother-practitioners, and they held a consultation, the upshot of which was that they had come to the conclusion nothing short of a miracle could save Hilda's life—a conclusion that she herself had arrived at some hours before.

"Doctor," she said, "I trust to you to let me know when the end is near. I wish my husband to be present when I die, but not before."

"Hush, my child—never talk of dying yet. Please God, you have many years of life before you."

She shook her golden head a little sadly.

"No, doctor, my sand has run out, and perhaps it is as well. Give me the child—why do you keep the child away from me? It is the messenger sent to call me to a happier world. Yes, she is an angel messenger. When I am gone, see that you call her 'Angela,' so that I may know by what name to greet her when the time comes."

During the course of the morning, she expressed a strong desire to see Maria Lee, who was accordingly sent for.

It will be remembered that old Mr. Caresfoot had on the previous day, immediately after Hilda had left him, sat down and written to Maria Lee. In this note he told her the whole shameful truth, ending it with a few words of bitter humiliation and self-reproach that such a thing

should have befallen her at the hands of one bearing his name. Over the agony of shame and grief thus let loose upon this unfortunate girl we will draw a veil. It is fortunate for the endurance of human reason that life does not hold many such hours as that through which she passed after the receipt of this letter. As was but natural, notwithstanding old Mr. Caresfoot's brief vindication of Hilda's conduct in his letter, Maria was filled with indignation at what to herself she called her treachery and deceit.

While she was yet full of these thoughts, a messenger came galloping over from Bratham Abbey, bringing a note from Dr. Caley that told her of her old friend's sudden death, and of Hilda's dangerous condition, and her desire to see her. The receipt of this news plunged her into a fresh access of grief, for she had grown fond of the old man; nor had the warm affection for Hilda that had found a place in her gentle heart been altogether wrenched away; and, now that she heard that her rival was face to face with that King of Terrors, before whom all earthly love, hate, hope, and ambition must fall down and cease their troubling, it revived in all its force; nor did any thought of her own wrongs come to chill it.

Within half an hour she was at the door of the Abbey House, where the doctor met her, and, in answer to her eager question, told her that, humanly speaking, it was impossible her friend could live through another twenty-four hours, adding an injunction that she must not stay with her long.

She entered the sick-room with a heavy heart, and there from Hilda's dying lips she heard the story of her marriage and of Philip's perfidy. Their reconciliation was as complete as her friend's failing voice and strength

would allow. At length she tore herself away, and, turning at the door, took her last look at Hilda, who had raised herself upon her elbow, and was gazing at her retreating form with an earnestness that was very touching. The eyes, Maria felt, were taking their fill of what they looked upon for the last time in this world. Catching her tearful gaze, the dying woman smiled, and, lifting her hand, pointed upwards. Thus they parted.

But Maria could control herself no longer: her own blasted prospects, the loss of the man she loved, and the affecting scene through which she had just passed, all helped to break her down. Running downstairs into the dining-room, she threw herself on a sofa, and gave full passage to her grief. Presently she became aware that she was not alone. Philip stood before her, or, rather, the wreck of him whom she knew as Philip. Indeed, it was hard to recognise in this scared man, with dishevelled hair, white and trembling lips, and eyes ringed round with black, the bold, handsome youth whom she had loved. The sight of him stayed her sorrow, and a sense of her bitter injuries rushed in upon her.

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"What! I want forgiveness. I am crushed, Maria, crushed—quite crushed," and he put his hands to his face and sobbed.

She answered him with the quiet dignity that good women can command in moments of emergency—dignity of a very different stamp from Hilda's haughty pride, but perhaps as impressive in its way.

"You ask forgiveness of me, and say that you are crushed. Has it occurred to you that, without fault of my own, except the fault of trusting you as entirely as I loved you, I too am crushed? Do you know that you

have wantonly, or to gain selfish ends, broken my heart, blighted my name, and driven me from my home, for I can live here no more? Do you understand that you have done me one of the greatest injuries one person can do to another? I say, do you know all this, Philip Caresfoot, and, knowing it, do you still ask me to forgive you? Do you think it possible that I *can* forgive?"

He had never heard her speak like this before, and did not remember that intense feeling is the mother of eloquence. He gazed at her for a moment in astonishment; then he dropped his face into his hands again and groaned, making no other answer. After waiting a while, she went on—

"I am an insignificant creature, I know, and perhaps the mite of my happiness or misery makes little difference in the scale of things; but to me the gift of all my love was everything. I gave it to you, Philip—gave it without a doubt or murmur, gave it with both hands. I can never have it back to give again! How you have treated it you best know." Here she broke down a little, and then continued: "It may seem curious, but though my love has been so mistakenly given; though you to whom it was given have dealt so ill with it; yet I am anxious that on my side there should be no bitter memory, that, in looking back at all this in after years, you should never be able to dwell upon any harsh or unkind word of mine. It is on that account, and also because I feel that it is not for me to judge you, and that you have already much to bear, that I do as you ask me, and say, 'Philip, from my heart I forgive you, as I trust that the Almighty may forgive me.'"

He flung himself upon his knees before her, and

tried to take her hand. "You do not know how you have humbled me," he groaned.

She gazed at him with pity.

"I am sorry," she said; "I did not wish to humble you. I have one word more to say, and then I must go. I have just bid my last earthly farewell to—your wife. My farewell to you must be as complete as that, as complete as though the grave had already swallowed one of us. We have done with each other for ever. I do not think that I shall come back here. In my waking moments your name shall never willingly pass my lips again. I will say it for the last time now. *Philip, Philip, Philip,* whom I chose to love out of all the world, I pray God that He will take me, or deaden the edge of what I suffer, and that He may never let my feet cross your path or my eyes fall upon your face again."

In another second she had passed out of the room and out of his life.

That night, or rather just before dawn on the following morning, Hilda, knowing that her end was very near, sent for her husband.

"Go quickly, doctor," she said. "I shall die at dawn."

The doctor found him seated in the same spot where Maria Lee had left him.

"What, more misery!" he said, when he had told his errand. "I cannot bear it. There is a curse upon me —death and wickedness, misery and death!"

"You must come if you wish to see your wife alive."

"I will come;" and he rose and followed him.

A sad sight awaited him. The moment of the grey dawn was drawing near, and, by his wife's request, a

window had been unshuttered, that her dimmed eyes might once more look upon the light. On the great bed in the centre of the room lay Hilda, whose life was now quickly draining from her, and by her side was placed the sleeping infant. She was raised and supported on either side by pillows, and her unbound golden hair fell around her shoulders, enclosing her face as in a frame. Her pallid countenance seemed touched with an awful beauty that had not belonged to it in life, whilst in her eyes was the dread and prescient gaze which sometimes comes to those who are about to solve death's mystery.

By the side of the bed knelt Mr. Fraser, the clergyman of the parish, repeating in an earnest tone the prayers for the dying, whilst the sad-faced attendants moved with muffled tread backwards and forwards from the ring of light around the bed into the dark shadows that lay beyond.

When Philip came, the clergyman ceased praying, and drew back into the further part of the room, as did Pigott and the nurse, the former taking the baby with her.

Hilda motioned to him to come close to her. He came, and bent over and kissed her, and she, with an effort, threw one ivory arm around his neck, and smiled sweetly. After about a minute, during which she was apparently collecting her thoughts, she spoke in a low voice, and in her native tongue.

"I have not sent for you before, Philip, for two reasons—first, because I wished to spare you pain; and next, in order that I might have time to rid my mind of angry thoughts against you. They are all gone now—gone with every other earthly interest; but I *was* angry with you, Philip. And now listen to me—for I have not much time—and do not forget my words in future years,

when the story of my life will seem but as a shadow that once fell upon your path. Change your ways, Philip dear, abandon deceit, atone for the past; if you can, make your peace with Maria Lee, and marry her—ah! it is a pity that you did not do that at first, and leave me to go my path—and, above all, humble your heart before the Power that I am about to face. I love you, dear, and, nothwithstanding all, I am thankful to have been your wife. Please God, we shall meet again."

She paused a while, and then spoke in English. To the astonishment of all in the room, her voice was strong and clear, and she uttered her words with an energy that, under the circumstances, seemed almost awful.

"Tell her to bring the child."

There was no need for Philip to repeat what she said, for Pigott heard her, and at once came forward with the baby, which she laid beside her.

The dying woman placed her hand upon its tiny head, and, turning her eyes upwards with the rapt expression of one who sees a vision, said—

"May the power of God be about you to protect you, my motherless babe, may angels guard you, making you as they are; and may the heavy curse and everlasting doom of the Almighty fall upon those who would bring evil upon you."

She paused, and then addressed her husband.

"Philip, you have heard my words; in your charge I leave the child, see that you never betray my trust."

Then, turning to Pigott, she said, in a fainter voice—

"Thank you for your kindness to me. You have a good face; if you can, stop with my child, and give her your love and care. And now, may God have mercy on my soul!"

Then came a minute's silence, broken only by the stifled sobs of those who stood around, till a ray of light from the rising sun struggled through the grey mist of the morning, and, touching the heads of mother and child, illumined them as with a glory. It passed as quickly as it came, drawing away with it the mother's life. Suddenly, as it faded, she spread out her arms, sighed, and smiled. When the doctor reached the bed, her story was told: she had fallen asleep.

Death had been very gentle with her.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTERWARDS.

Go, any one of you, and look at your village churchyard, if the day is dull, and you feel inclined to moralise —for, whatever may be said to the contrary, there are less useful occupations. What do you see before you? A plot of enclosed ground backed by a grey old church, a number of tombstones more or less decrepit, and a great quantity of little oblong mounds covered with rank grass. If you have any imagination, any power of thought, you will see more than that. First, with the instinctive selfishness of human nature, you will recognise your own future habitation; perhaps your eye will mark the identical spot where, till the crash of doom, the body you love must lie through all seasons and weathers, through the slow centuries that will flit so fast for you. It is good that you should think of that, although it makes you shudder. The English churchyard takes the place of the Egyptian mummy at the feast, or the slave in the Roman conqueror's car—it mocks your vigour, and whispers of the end of beauty and strength.

Probably you need some such reminder. But, if giving to the inevitable the sigh that is its due, you pursue the vein of thought, it may further occur to you that the plot before you is in a sense a summary of the aspirations of humanity. It marks the realisation of human hopes, it is the crown of human ambitions, the grave of human failures. Here, too, is the end of the man, and here the birthplace of the angel or the demon. It is his sure inheritance, one that he never solicits and never squanders; and, last, it is the only certain resting-place of sleepless, tired mortality.

It was here that they brought Hilda, and the old squire, and laid them side by side against the coffin of yeoman Caresfoot, whose fancy it had been to be buried in stone, and then piling primroses and blackthorn blooms upon their graves, they left them to their chilly sleep. Farewell to them; they have passed to where as yet we may not follow. Violent old man and proud and lovely woman, rest in peace, if peace be the portion of you both!

The news of the sudden decease of old Mr. Caresfoot; of the discovery of Philip's secret marriage and the death of his wife; of the terms of the old man's will, under which, Hilda being dead, and having only left a daughter behind her, George inherited all the unentailed portion of the property, with the curious provision that he was never to leave it back to Philip or his children; of the sudden departure of Miss Lee, and of many other things, that were some of them true and some of them false, following as they did upon the heels of the great dinner-party, and the announcement made thereat, threw the country-side into a state of indescribable ferment. When

this settled down, it left a strong and permanent residuum of public indignation and contempt directed against Philip, the more cordially, perhaps, because he was no longer a rich man. People very rarely express contempt or indignation against a rich man who happens to be their neighbour in the country, whatever he may have done. They keep their virtue for those who are impoverished, or for their unfortunate relations. But it was felt that there was no excuse and no forgiveness for Philip; he had lost both his character and his money, and must therefore be cut, and from that day forward he was cut accordingly.

As for Philip himself, as yet he was fortunately ignorant of the kind intentions of his friends and neighbours, who had been so fond of him a week ago. He had enough upon his shoulders without that--for he had spoken no lie when he told Maria Lee that he was crushed by the dreadful and repeated blows which had fallen upon him, blows that had robbed him of everything that made life worth living, and given him in return nothing but an infant who could not inherit, and who was therefore only an incumbrance.

Who is it that says, "After all, let a bad man take what pains he may to push it down, a human soul is an awful, ghostly, unique possession for a bad man to have!" During the time that had elapsed between the death and burial of his father and wife, Philip had become thoroughly acquainted with the truth of this remark.

Do what he could, he could never for a single hour shake himself free from the recollection of his father's death; whenever he shut his eyes, his uneasy mind continually conjured up the whole scene with uncanny distinctness; the gloomy room, the contorted face of the

dying man, the red flicker of the firelight on the wall—all these things were burnt deep into the tablets of his memory. More and more did he recognise the fact that, even should he live long enough to bury the events of that hour beneath the débris of many years, the lapse of time would be insufficient to bring forgetfulness, and the recognition brought with it moral helplessness. Philip had, too, sufficient religious feeling to make him uneasy as to his future fate, and possessed a certain amount of imagination, which was at this time all directed towards that awful day when he and his dead father must settle their final accounts. Already, in the quiet nights, he would wake with a start, thinking that the inevitable time had come. Superstitious fear also would seize him with their clammy fingers, and he would shake and tremble at the fancied step of ghostly feet, and his blood would curdle in his veins as his mind hearkened to voices that were for ever still.

And, worst of all, what had been done, and could never be undone, had been done in vain. These deadly torments must be endured, whilst the object for which they had been incurred had utterly escaped him. He had sold himself to the powers of evil for a price, and that price had not been paid. But the bond was good for all that.

And so he would brood, hour after hour, till he felt himself drawing near to madness. Sometimes by a strong effort he would succeed in tearing his mind away from the subject, but then its place was instantly filled by a proud form with reproachful eyes, and he would feel that there, too, death had put it out of his power to make atonement. Of those whom he had wronged, Maria Lee alone survived, and she had left him in sorrow, more

bitter than any anger. Truly, Philip Caresfoot was in melancholy case. Somewhere he had read that the wages of sin is death, but surely what he felt surpassed the bitterness of death. His evil-doing had not prospered with him. The snare which he had set for his father had fallen back upon himself, and he was a crushed and ruined man.

It affords a curious insight into his character to reflect that all these piled-up calamities, all this wreck and sudden death, did not bring him penitent on his knees before the Maker whom he had outraged. The crimes he had committed, especially if unsuccessful, or the sorrows that had fallen upon him, would have sufficed to reduce nine-tenths of ordinary men to a condition of humble supplication. For, generally speaking, irreligion, or rather forgetfulness of God, is a plant of no deep growth in the human heart, since its roots are turned by the rock of that innate knowledge of a higher Power that forms the foundation of every soul, and on which we are glad enough to set our feet when the storms of trouble and emergency threaten to destroy us. But with Philip this was not so. He never thought of repentance. His was not the nature to fall down and say, "Lord, I have sinned; take thou my burden from me." Indeed, he was not so much troubled for the past as fearful for the future. It was not grief for wrong-doing that wrung his heart and broke his spirit, but rather his natural sorrow at losing the only creature he had ever deeply loved, chagrin at the shame of his position and the failure of his hopes, and the icy fingers of superstitious fears.

The crisis had come and passed: he had sinned against his Father in heaven and his father on earth, and he did not sorrow for his sin; his wife had left him,

murmuring with her dying lips exhortations to repentance, and he did not soften; shame and loss had fallen upon him, and he did not turn to God. But his pride was broken, all that remained to him of strength was his wickedness; the flood that had swept over him had purged away not the evil but the good; from the evil it only took its courage. Henceforth, if he sins at all, his will be no bold and hazardous villainy which, whilst it excites horror, can almost compel respect, but rather the low and sordid crime, the safe and treacherous inquity.

Ajax no longer defies the lightning—he mutters curses on it beneath his breath.

On the evening of the double funeral—which Philip did not feel equal to attending, and at which George, in a most egregious hatband and with many sobs and tears, officiated as chief mourner—Mr. Fraser thought it would be a kind act on his part to go and offer such consolation to the bereaved man as lay within his power, if indeed he would accept it. On arriving at the Abbey House, somewhat contrary to his expectation, he was asked in without delay.

"I am glad to see a human face," said Philip to the clergyman, as he entered the room; "this loneliness is intolerable. I am as much alone as though I lay stark in the churchyard like my poor wife."

Mr. Fraser did not answer him immediately, so taken up was he in noticing the wonderful changes a week had wrought in Philip's appearance. Not only did his countenance bear traces of the illness and exhaustion that might not unnaturally be expected in such a case of bereavement, but it faithfully reflected the change that had taken place in his mental attitude. His eyes had lost the frank boldness that had made them very pleasing to some

people, they looked scared; the mouth too was rendered conspicuous by the absence of the firm lines that once gave it character; indeed the man's whole appearance was pitiful and almost abject.

"I am afraid," he said at length, in a tone of gentle compassion, "that you must have suffered a great deal, Caresfoot."

"Suffered! I have suffered the tortures of the damned! I still suffer them; I shall always suffer them."

"I do not wish," said the clergyman, with a little hesitation, "to appear officious or to make a mockery of your grief by telling you that it is for your good; but I should fail in my duty if I did not point out to you that He who strikes the blow has the power to heal the wound, and that very often such things are for our ultimate benefit, either in this world or the next. Carry your troubles to God, my dear fellow, acknowledge His hand, and, if you know in your heart of any way in which you have sinned, offer Him your hearty repentance; do this and you will not be deserted. Your life, that now seems to you nothing but ashes, may yet be both a happy and a useful one."

Philip smiled bitterly as he answered—

"You talk to me of repentance—how can I repent when Providence has treated me so cruelly, robbing me at a single blow of my wife and my fortune? I know that I did wrong in concealing my marriage, but I was driven to it by fear of my father. Ah! if you had seen him as I saw him, you would have known that they were right to call him 'Devil Caresfoot.'" He checked himself, and then went on—"He forced me into the engagement with Miss Lee, and announced it without my consent. Now I am ruined—everything is taken from me."

"You have your little daughter, and all the entailed estate—at least, so I am told."

"My little daughter!—I never want to see her face; she killed her mother. If it had been a boy, it would have been different, for then, at any rate, that accursed George would not have got my birthright. My little daughter, indeed! don't count her among my earthly blessings."

"It is rather sad to hear you talk like that of your child; but, at any rate, you are not left in want. You have one of the finest old places in the county, and a thousand a year, which to most men would be riches."

"And which to me," answered Philip, "is beggary. I should have had six, and I have got one. But look you here, Fraser, I swear before God——"

"Hush! I cannot listen to such talk."

"Well, then, before anything you like, that, while I live, I will never rest one single moment until I get my own back again. It may seem impossible, but I will find a way. For instance," he added, as a thought struck him, "strangely enough, the will does not forbid me to buy the lands back. If I can get them no other way I will buy them—do you hear?—I will buy them. I *must* have them again before I die."

"How will you get the money?"

"The money—I will save it, make it, steal it, get it somehow. Oh! do not be afraid; I will get the money. It will take a few years, but I will get it somehow. It is not the want of a few thousands that will stop a determined man."

"And suppose your cousin won't sell."

"I will find a way to make him sell—some bribe, something. There, there," and his enthusiasm and eager-

ness vanished in a moment, and the broken look came back upon his face. "It's all nonsense; I am talking impossibilities—a little weak in my mind, I suppose. Forget it, there's a good fellow; say nothing about it. And so you buried them? Ah, me! ah, me! And George did chief mourner. I suppose he blubbered freely; he always could blubber freely when he liked. I remember how he used to take folks in as a lad, and then laugh at them; that is why they called him 'Crocodile' at school. Well, he is my master now, and I'm his very humble servant; perhaps one day it will be the other way up again. What, must you go? If you knew how fearfully lonely I am, you would not go. My nerves have quite gone, and I fancy all sorts of things. I can think of nothing but those two graves out there in the dark. Have they sodded them over? Tell them to sod them over. It was kind of you to come and see me. You must not pay any attention to my talk; I am not quite myself. Good-night."

Mr. Fraser was an extremely unsuspicious man, but somehow, as he picked his way to the vicarage to eat his solitary chop, he felt a doubt rising in his mind as to whether, his disclaimer notwithstanding, Philip had not sincerely meant all he said.

"He is shockingly changed," he mused, "and I am not sure that it is a change for the better. Poor fellow, he has a great deal to bear, and should be kindly judged. It is all so painful that I must try to divert my mind. Mrs. Brown, will you bring me a little chocolate-coloured book, that you will see on the table in my study when you come back with the potatoes? It has Plato—P-l-a-t-o—printed on the back."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. BELLAMY ASSERTS HIMSELF.

THE jubilation of George at the turn events had taken may perhaps be more easily imagined than described. There is generally one weak point about all artful schemes to keep other people out of their rights; they break down over some unforeseen detail, or through the neglect of some trivial and obvious precaution. But this was one of the glorious instances to the contrary that prove the rule. Nothing had broken down, everything had prospered as a holy cause always should, and does—in theory. The stars in their courses had fought for Sisera, everything had succeeded beyond expectation, nothing had failed. In the gratitude of his heart, George would willingly have given a thousand pounds towards the establishment of a training-school for anonymous letter-writers, or the erection of a statue to Hilda Caresfoot, whose outraged pride and womanly jealousy had done him such yeoman service.

Speaking seriously, he had great cause for rejoicing. Instead of a comparatively slender younger son's portion, he had stepped into a fine and unencumbered property of over five thousand a year, and that in the heyday of his youth, when in the full possession of all his capacities for enjoyment, which were large indeed. Henceforth everything that money could buy would be his, including the respect and flattery of his poorer neighbours. An added flavour too was given to the overflowing cup of his good fortune by the fact that it had been wrenched from the hands of the cousin whom he hated, and on whom he had from a boy sworn to be avenged. Poor

Philip! bankrupt in honour and broken in fortune, he could afford to pity him now, to pity him ostentatiously and in public. He was open-handed with his pity was George. Nor did he lack a sympathiser in these delicious moments of unexpected triumph.

"Did I not tell you," said Mrs. Bellamy, in her full, rich tones, on the afternoon of the reading of the will—"did I not tell you that, if you would consent to be guided by me, I would pull you through, and have I not pulled you through? Never misdoubt my judgment again, my dear George; it is infinitely sounder than your own."

"You did, Anne, you certainly did; you are a charming woman, and as clever as you are charming."

"Compliments are all very well, and I am sure I appreciate yours"—and she gave a little curtesy—"at their proper value; but I must remind you, George, that I have done my part of the bargain, and that now you must do yours."

"Oh! that's all right; Bellamy shall have the agency and two hundred a year with it, and to show you that I have not forgotten you, perhaps you will accept this memorial of our joint achievement;" and he drew from his pocket and opened a case containing a superb set of sapphires.

Mrs. Bellamy had all a beautiful woman's love for jewels, and especially adored sapphires.

"Oh!" she said, clasping her hands, "thank you, George; they are perfectly lovely!"

"Perhaps," he replied, politely; "but not half so lovely as their wearer. I wonder," he added, with a little laugh, "what the old boy would say, if he could know that a thousand pounds of his personalty had gone by anticipation to buy a necklace for Anne Bellamy."

To this remark she made no reply, being apparently absorbed in her own thoughts. At last she spoke.

"I don't want to seem ungracious, George, but these" —and she touched the jewels—"were not the reward I expected; I want back the letters you promised me."

"My dear Anne, you are under a mistake, I never promised you the letters; I said that, under the circumstances, I might possibly restore them—a very different thing from promising."

Mrs. Bellamy flushed a little, and the great pupils of her sleepy eyes contracted till she looked quite dangerous.

"Then I must have strangely misunderstood you," she said.

"What do you want the letters for? Cannot you trust me with them?"

"Don't you think, George, that if you had passed through something very terrible, you would like to have all the mementoes of that dark time destroyed? Those letters are the record of my terrible time; nothing remains of it but those written lines. I want to burn them, to stamp them into powder, to obliterate them as I have obliterated all the past. Whilst they exist I can never feel safe. Supposing you were to turn traitor to me and let those letters fall into the hands of others, supposing that you lost them, I should be a ruined woman. I speak frankly, you see; I fully appreciate my danger, principally because I know that, the more intimate a man and woman have been, the more chance there is of their becoming bitter enemies. George, give me those letters; do not overcloud my future with the shadows of the past."

"You talk as well as you do everything else, Anne; you are really a very remarkable woman. But, curiously enough, those letters, the existence of which is so ob-

noxious to you, are to me a source of great interest. You know that I love to study character—curious occupation for a young man, isn't it?—but I do. Well, in my small experience, I have never yet, either in fiction or in real life, come across such a fascinating display as is reflected in those letters. There I can, and often do, trace in minutest detail the agony of a strong mind, can see the barriers of what people call religion, early training, self-respect, and other curiosities which we name virtues, bursting away one by one under pressure, like the water-tight bulkheads they put in passenger steamers, till at length the work is done; the moral ship sinks, and the writer stands revealed what you are, my dear Anne, the loveliest, the cleverest, and the most utterly unscrupulous woman in the three kingdoms."

She rose very quietly, but quite white with passion, and answered in her low voice—

"Whatever I am you made me, and *you* are a devil, George Caresfoot, or you could not take pleasure in the tortures you inflicted before you destroyed. But, don't go too far, or you may regret it. Am I a woman to be played with? I think that you have trained me too well."

He laughed a little uneasily.

"There, you see; *grattez le Russe,* &c., and out comes the true character. Look at your face in the glass; it is magnificent, but not pleasant; rather dangerous, indeed. Why, Anne, do be reasonable; if I gave you those letters, I should never be able to sleep in peace. For the sake of my own safety I dare not abandon the whiphand I have of you. Remember, you could, if you chose, say some unpleasant things about me, and I don't want that any more than you do just now. But, you see, whilst I hold in my power what would, if necessary, effectually

ruin you, and probably Bellamy too—for this county society is absurdly prejudiced—I have little cause for fear. Perhaps in the future you may be able to render me some service for which you shall have the letters—who knows? You see I am perfectly frank with you, for the simple reason that I know that it is useless to try to conceal my thoughts from a person of your penetration."

"Well, well, perhaps you are right: it is difficult to trust oneself, much more any one else. At any rate," she said, with a bitter smile, "you have given me Bellamy, a start in society, and a sapphire necklace. In twenty years, I hope, if the fates are kind, to have lost Bellamy on the road—he is really unendurable—to rule society, and to have as many sapphire necklaces and other fine things as I care for. In enumerating my qualities, you omitted one, ambition."

"With your looks, your determination, and your brains, there is nothing that you will not be able to do if you set your mind to it, and don't make an enemy of your devoted friend."

And thus the conversation ended.

Now little Mr. Bellamy, after much anxious thought, just about this time had come to a bold determination—namely, to assert his marital authority over Mrs. Bellamy. Indeed, his self-pride was much injured by the treatment he received at his wife's hands, for it seemed to him that he was utterly ignored in his own house. In fact, it would not be too much to say that he *was* an entire nonentity. He had married Mrs. Bellamy for love, or rather from fascination, though she had nothing in the world—married her in a fortnight from the time that George had first introduced him. When he walked out of church with his beautiful bride, he had thought him-

self the luckiest man in London, whereas now he could not but feel that matrimony had not fulfilled his expectations. In the first place, Love's young dream—he was barely thirty—came to a rude awakening, for, once married, it was impossible—though, in common with the majority of little men, he had a tolerably good opinion of himself—but that he should perceive that his wife did not care one brass farthing about him. To his soft advances she was as cold as a marble statue; the lovely eyes never grew tender for him. Indeed, he found that she was worse than a statue, for statues cannot indulge in bitter mockery and contemptuous comments, and Mrs. Bellamy could, and, what is more, frequently did.

"It is very well," reflected her husband, "to marry the loveliest woman in the county, but I don't see the use of it if she treats one like a dog."

At last this state of affairs had grown intolerable, and, meditating in the solitude of his office, Mr. Bellamy resolved to assert himself once for all, to set matters on a proper footing, and Mrs. Bellamy in her place. But it is one thing for husbands of the Bellamy stamp to form high-stomached resolutions, and another for them to put those resolutions into active and visible operation on wives of the Mrs. Bellamy stamp. Indeed, had it not been for a little incident about to be detailed, it is doubtful if Mr. Bellamy would have ever come to the scratch at all.

When George had gone, Mrs. Bellamy sat down to think in by no means the sweetest of tempers. But thinking in this instance proved an unprofitable occupation, and she gave it up, in order to admire the sapphire necklace which lay upon her knee. At that moment her husband entered the room, but she took no notice, merely

going on examining the stones. After moving about a little, as though to attract attention, the gentleman spoke.

"I have managed to get home to lunch, my dear."

"Indeed."

"Well, you might take a little notice of me."

"Why? Is there anything remarkable about you this morning?"

"No, there is not; but, remarkable or not, a man who has been fool enough"—Mr. Bellamy laid great emphasis on the word "fool"—"to get married has a right to expect when he comes into his own house that he will have a little notice taken of him, and not be as completely overlooked as—as though he did not exist;" and he puffed out his chest, rubbed his hands, and looked defiant.

The lady laid her head back on the chair, and laughed with exquisite enjoyment.

"Really, my dear John, you will kill me," she said, at length.

"May I ask," he replied, furiously, and looking as though there was nothing in the world that he would like better, "what you are laughing at?"

"Oh! certainly yes, if you like; at you; you will be ill if you lose your temper so."

"I have not lost my temper, madam; I am perfectly cool," he replied, positively gasping with anger. Here his eye fell upon the necklace. "What necklace is that? who gave you that necklace? I demand to know."

"You *demand* to know! Be careful what you say, please. Mr. George Caresfoot gave me the necklace. It cost a thousand pounds. Are you satisfied?"

"No, I am not satisfied; I will not have that cursed George Caresfoot continually here. I will send him back

his necklace. I will assert my rights as an Englishman and a husband, I will——"

"You will sit down and listen to me."

The tone of the voice checked his absurd linguistic and physical capers, and caused him to look at his wife. She was standing and pointing to a chair. Her face was calm and immovable, only her eyes appeared to expand and contract with startling rapidity. One glance was enough for Bellamy. He felt frightened, and sat down in the chair.

"That's right," she said, pleasantly; "now we can have a cosy chat. John, you are a lawyer, and therefore, I suppose, more or less a man of the world. Now, *as* a lawyer and a man of the world, I ask you to look at me and then at yourself, and say if you think it likely or even possible that I married you for love. To be frank, I did nothing of the sort; I married you because you were the person most suited to my purpose. If you will only understand that, it will save us both a great deal of trouble. As for your talk about asserting yourself and exerting your authority, it is simple nonsense. You are very well in your way, my dear John, and a fair attorney; but do you suppose for one moment that you are capable of matching yourself against me? If so, you make a shocking mistake. Be advised, and do not try the experiment. But don't think that the bargain is all on my side—it is not. If you will behave yourself properly, and be guided by my advice, I will make you one of the richest and most powerful men in the county. If you will not, I shall shake myself free of you as soon as I am strong enough. Rise I must and will, and if you will not rise with me, I will rise alone. As regards your complaints of my not caring about you, the world

is wide, my dear John; console yourself elsewhere. I shall not be jealous. And now I think I have explained everything. It is so much more satisfactory to have a clear understanding. Come, shall we go to lunch?"

But Bellamy wanted no lunch that day.

"After all," he soliloquised to himself, between the pangs of a racking headache brought on by his outburst of temper, "time sometimes brings its revenges, and, if it does, you may look out, Mrs. Bellamy."

CHAPTER XV.

THE ABBEY HOUSE.

It is perhaps time that the reader should know a little of the ancient house and locality where many of the personages of whose history these pages treat, lived and moved and had their being.

The Abbey House, so called, was in reality that part of the monastery which had been devoted to the use of successive generations of priors. Like the ruins that lay to its rear, it was entirely built of grey masonry, rendered greyer still by the lichens that fed upon its walls, which were of exceeding strength and thickness. It was a long, irregular building, and roofed with old and narrow tiles, which from red, in the course of ages, had faded to sober russet. The banqueting-hall was a separate building at its northern end, and connected with the main dwelling by a covered way. The aspect of the house was westerly, and the front windows looked on to an expanse of park-like land, heavily timbered with oaks of large size, some of them pollards that might have pushed their first leaves in the time of William the Conqueror. In spring their vivid green was diversified by the red-

dish brown of a double line of noble walnut-trees, a full half mile in length, marking the track of the carriage-drive that led to the Roxham high-road.

Behind the house lay the walled garden, celebrated in the time of the monks as being a fortnight earlier than any other in the neighbourhood. Skirting the southern wall of this garden, which was a little less than a hundred paces long, the visitor reached the scattered ruins of the old monastery that for generations had served as a stone quarry to the surrounding villages, but of which enough was left, including a magnificent gateway, to show how great had been its former extent. Passing on through these, he would come to an enclosure that marked the boundaries of the old graveyard, now turned to agricultural uses, and then to the church itself, a building with a very fine tower, but possessing no particular interest, if we except some exceedingly good brasses and a colossal figure of a monk cut out of the solid heart of an oak, and supposed to be the effigy of a prior of the abbey who died in the time of Edward I. Below the church again, and about one hundred and fifty paces from it, was the vicarage, a comparatively modern building, possessing no architectural attraction, and evidently reared out of the remains of the monastery.

At the south end of the Abbey House itself lay a small grass plot and pleasure-garden fringed with shrubberies, and adorned with two fine cedar-trees. One of these trees grew at its further extremity, and under it there ran a path cut through the dense shrubbery. This path, which was edged with limes and called the "Tunnel Walk," led to the lake, and debouched in the little glade where stood Caresfoot's Staff. The lake itself was a fine piece of water, partly natural and partly constructed by

the monks, measuring a full mile round, and from fifty to two hundred yards in width. It was in the shape of a man's shoe, the heel facing west like the house, but projecting beyond it, the narrow part representing the hollow of the instep, being exactly opposite to it, and the sole swelling out in an easterly direction.

Bratham Abbey was altogether a fine old place, but the most remarkable thing about it was its air of antiquity and the solemnity of its peace. It did not, indeed, strike the spirit with that religious awe which is apt to fall upon us as we gaze along the vaulted aisles of great cathedrals, but it appealed perhaps with equal strength to the softer and more reflective side of our nature. For generation after generation that house had been the home of men like ourselves; they had passed and were forgotten, but it remained, the sole witness of the stories of their lives. Hands, of which the very bones had long since crumbled into dust, had planted those old oaks and walnuts, that still donned their green robes in summer, and shed them in the autumn, to stand like great skeletons through the winter months, awaiting the resurrection of the spring.

There lay upon the place and its surroundings a burden of dead lives, intangible, but none the less real. The air was thick with memories, as suggestive as the grey dust in a vault. Even in the summer, in the full burst of Nature revelling in her strength, the place was sad. But in the winter, when the wind came howling through the groaning trees, and drove the grey scud across an ashy sky, when the birds were dumb, and there were no cattle on the sodden lawn, its isolated melancholy was a palpable thing.

That hoary house might have been a gateway of the

dim land we call the Past, looking down in stony sorrow on the follies of mankind, and, to the wise who could hear the lesson, pregnant with echoes of the warning voice of many generations.

Here it was that Angela grew up to womanhood.

Some nine and a half years had passed from the date of the events described in the foregoing pages, when one evening Mr. Fraser bethought him that he had been indoors all day, and proposed reading till late that night, and that therefore he had better take some exercise.

A tall and somewhat nervous-looking man, with dark eyes, a sensitive mouth, and that peculiar stoop and pallor of complexion which those devoted to much study almost invariably acquire, Mr. Fraser had "student" written on his face. His history was a sufficiently common one. He possessed academical abilities of a very high order, and had in his youth distinguished himself greatly at college, both as a classical and mathematical scholar. When quite young, through the influence of a relation, he was appointed to his present living, where the income was good and the population very small indeed. Freed from all necessity for exertion, he shut himself up with his books, having his little round of parish work for relaxation, and never sought to emerge from the quiet of his aimless studies to struggle for fame and place in the laborious world. Mr. Fraser was what people call an able man thrown away. If they had known his shy, sensitive nature a little better, they would have understood that he was infinitely more suited for the solitary and peaceful lot in life which he had chosen, than to become a unit in the turbulent and greedy crowd that

struggles through all the ages up the slippery steps of the temple of that greatest of our gods—Success.

There are many such men; probably you who read know one or two. With infinite labour they store up honey from the fields of knowledge, collect endless data from the statistics of science, pile up their calculations against the very stars; and all to no end. As a rule, they do not write books; they gather the learning for the learning's sake, and for the very love of it rejoice to count their labour lost. And thus they go on from year to year, until the golden bowl is broken and the pitcher broken at the fountain, and the gathered knowledge sinks, or appears to sink, back to whence it came. Alas, that one generation cannot hand on to another its wisdom and experience—more especially its experience—in its perfect form! If it could, we men should soon become as gods.

It was a mild evening in the latter end of October when Mr. Fraser started on his walk. The moon was up in the heavens as, an hour later, he made his way from the side of the lake, where he had been wandering, back to the churchyard through which he had to pass to reach the vicarage. Just before he came to the gate, however, he was surprised, in such a solitary spot, to see a slight figure leaning against the wall opposite the place where lay the mortal remains of the old squire and his daughter-in-law, Hilda. He stood still and watched; the figure appeared to be gazing steadily at the graves. Presently it turned and saw him, and he recognised the great grey eyes and golden hair of little Angela Caresfoot.

"Angela, my dear, what are you doing here at this time of night?" he asked, in some surprise.

She blushed a little as she shook hands rather awkwardly with him.

"Don't be angry with me," she said, in a deprecatory voice; "but I was so lonely this evening that I came here for company."

"Came here for company! What do you mean?"

She hung her head.

"Come," he said, "tell me what you mean."

"I don't quite know myself. How can I tell you?"

He looked more puzzled than ever, and she observed it and went on:

"I will try to tell you, but you must not be cross like Pigott when she cannot understand me. Sometimes I feel ever so much alone, as though I was seeking for something and could not find it, and then I come and stand here and look at my mother's grave, and I get company and am not lonely any more. That is all I know; I cannot tell you any more. Do you think me silly? Pigott does."

"I think you are a very strange child. Are you not afraid to come here alone at night?"

"Afraid—oh, no! Nobody comes here; the people in the village dare not come here after dark, because they say that the ruins are full of spirits. Jakes told me that. But I must be stupid; I cannot see them, and I want so very much to see them. I hope it is not wrong, but I told my father so the other day, and he turned white and was angry with Pigott for giving me such ideas; but you know Pigott did not give them to me at all. I am not afraid to come; I like it, it is so quiet, and, if one listens enough in the quiet, I always think one may hear something that other people do not hear."

"Do you hear anything, then?"

"Yes, I hear things, but I cannot understand them. Listen to the wind in the branches of that tree, the chest-

nut, off which the leaf is falling now. It says something, if only I could catch it."

"Yes, child, yes, you are right in a way; all Nature tells the same eternal tale, if our ears were not stopped to its voices," he answered, with a sigh; indeed, the child's talk had struck a vein of thought familiar to his own mind, and, what is more, it deeply interested him; there was a quaint, far-off wisdom in it.

"It is pleasant to-night, is it not, Mr. Fraser?" said the little maid, "though everything is dying. The things die softy without any pain this year; last year they were all killed in the rain and wind. Look at that cloud floating across the moon; is it not beautiful? I wonder what it is the shadow of; I think all the clouds are shadows of something up in heaven."

"And when there are no clouds?"

"Oh! then heaven is quite still and happy."

"But heaven is always happy."

"Is it? I don't understand how it can be always happy if *we* go there. There must be so many to be sorry for."

Mr. Fraser mused a little; that last remark was difficult to answer. He looked at the fleecy cloud, and, falling into her humour, said—

"I think your cloud is the shadow of an eagle carrying a lamb to its little ones."

"And I think," she answered confidently, "that it is the shadow of an angel carrying a baby home."

Again he was silenced; the idea was infinitely more poetical than his own.

"This," he reflected, "is a child of a curious mental calibre."

Before he could pursue the thought further, she broke in upon it in quite a different strain.

"Have you seen Jack and Jill? They *are* jolly."

"Who are Jack and Jill?"

"Why, my ravens, of course. I got them out of the old tree with a hole in it at the end of the lake."

"The tree at the end of the lake! Why, the hole where the ravens nest is fifty feet up. Who got them for you?"

"I got them myself. Sam—you know Sam—was afraid to go up. He said he should fall, and that the old birds would peck his eyes. So I went by myself one morning quite early, with a bag tied round my neck, and got up. It was hard work, and I nearly tumbled once; but I got on the bough beneath the hole at last. It shook very much; it is so rotten, you have no idea. There were three little ones in the nest, all with great mouths. I took two, and left one for the old birds. When I was nearly down again, the old birds found me out, and flew at me, and beat my head with their wings, and pecked—oh, they did peck! Look here," and she showed him a scar on her hand; "that's where they pecked. But I stuck to my bag, and got down at last, and I'm glad I did, for we are great friends now; and I am sure the cross old birds would be quite pleased if they knew how nicely I am educating their young ones, and how their manners have improved. But I say, Mr. Fraser, don't tell Pigott; she cannot climb trees, and does not like to see me do it. She does not know I went after them myself."

Mr. Fraser laughed.

"I won't tell her, Angela, my dear; but you must be careful—you might tumble and kill yourself."

"I don't think I shall, Mr. Fraser, unless I am meant to. God looks after me as much when I am up a tree as when I am upon the ground."

Once more he had nothing to say; he could not venture to disturb her faith.

"I will walk home with you, my dear. Tell me, Angela, would you like to learn?"

"Learn!—learn what?"

"Books, and the languages that other nations, nations that have passed away, used to talk, and how to calculate numbers and distances."

"Yes, I should like to learn very much; but who will teach me? I have learnt all Pigott knows two years ago, and since then I have been trying to learn about the trees and flowers and stars; but I look and watch, and can't understand."

"Ah! my dear, contact with Nature is the highest education; but the mind that would appreciate her wonders must have a foundation of knowledge to work upon. The uneducated man is rarely sensitive to the thousand beauties and marvels of the fields around him and the skies above him. But, if you like, I will teach you, Angela. I am practically an idle man, and it will give me great pleasure; but you must promise to work and do what I tell you."

"Oh, how good you are! Of course I will work. When am I to begin?"

"I don't know—to-morrow, if you like; but I must speak to your father first."

Her face fell a little at the mention of her father's name, but presently she said, quietly—

"My father, he will not care if I learn or not. I hardly ever see my father; he does not like me. I see nobody but Pigott and you and old Jakes, and Sam sometimes. You need not ask my father; he will never miss me whilst I am learning. Ask Pigott."

At that moment Pigott herself hove in view, in a great flurry.

"Oh, here you are, Miss Angela! Where have you been to, you naughty girl? At some of your star-gazing tricks again, I'll be bound, frightening the life out of a body. It's just too bad of you, Miss Angela."

The little girl looked at her with a peculiarly winning smile, and took her very solid hand between her own tiny palms.

"Don't be cross, Pigott dear," she said. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I couldn't help going—I couldn't indeed; and then I stopped talking to Mr. Fraser."

"There, there, I should just like to know who can be cross with you when you put on those ways. Are your feet wet? Ah! I thought so. Run on in and take them off."

"Won't that be just a little difficult?" and she was gone with a merry laugh.

"There, sir, that's just like her, catching a body up like and twisting what she says, till you don't know which is head and which is heels. I'll be bound you found her down yonder;" and she nodded towards the churchyard.

"Yes."

Pigott drew a little nearer, and spoke in a low voice.

"'Tis my belief, sir, that that child sees *things;* she is just the oddest child I ever saw. There's nothing she likes better than to slip out of a night, and to go to that there beastly churchyard, saving your presence, for 'company,' as she calls it—nice sort of company, indeed. And it is just the same way with storms. You remember that dreadful gale a month ago, the one that took down the North Grove and blew the spire off Rewtham Church. Well, just when it was at its worst, and I was a-sitting

and praying that the roof might keep over our heads, I look round for Angela, and can't see her. 'Some of your tricks again,' thinks I to myself; and just then up comes Mrs. Jakes to say that Sam had seen little missy creeping down the tunnel walk. I was that scared that I ran down, got hold of Sam, for Jakes said he wouldn't go out with all them trees a-flying about in the air like straws—no, not for a thousand pounds, and off we set after her." Here Pigott paused to groan at the recollection of that walk.

"Well," said Mr. Fraser, who was rather interested—everything about this queer child interested him; "where did you find her?"

"Well, sir, you know where the old wall runs out into the water, below Caresfoot's Staff there? Well, at the end of it there's a post sunk in, with a ring in it to tie boats to. Now, would you believe it? out there at the end of the wall, and tied to the ring by a scarf passed round her middle, was that dreadful child. She was standing there, her back against the post, right in the teeth of the gale, with the spray dashing over her, her arms stretched out before her, her hat gone, her long hair standing out behind straight as an iron bar, and her eyes flashing as though they were on fire, and all the while there were the great trees crashing down all round in a way enough to make a body sick with fright. We got her back safe, thank God; but how long we shall keep her, I'm sure I don't know. Now she is drowning herself in the lake, for she takes to the water like a duck, and now breaking her neck off trees, and now going to ghosts in the churchyard for company. It's wearing me to the bone—that's what it is."

Mr. Fraser smiled, for, to tell the truth, Pigott's bones were pretty comfortably covered.

"Come," he said, "you would not part with her for all her wicked deeds, would you?"

"Part with her," answered Pigott, in hot indignation, "part with my little beauty! I would rather part with my head. The love, there never was another like her, nor never will be, with her sweet ways; and, if I know anything about girls, she'll be the beauty of England, she will. She's made for a beautiful woman; and look at them eyes and forehead and hair—where did you ever see the like? And, as for her queer ways, what can you expect from a child as has got a great empty mind and nothing to put in it, and no one to talk to but a common woman like me, and a father"—here she dropped her voice—"as is a miser, and hates the sight of his own flesh and blood?"

"Hush! you should not say such things, Pigott! Now I will tell you something; I am going on to ask your master to allow me to educate Angela."

"I'm right glad to hear it, sir. She's sharp enough to learn anything, and it's kind of you to teach her. If you can make her mind like what her body will be if she lives, somebody will be a lucky man one of these days. Good-night, sir, and many thanks for bringing missy home."

Next day Angela began her education.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

ANGELA'S EDUCATION.

We are about to see Angela again, and to see a good deal of her; but you must be prepared for a change in her personal appearance, for the curtain has been down for ten years since last you met the child whose odd propensities excited Pigott's wonder and indignation and Mr. Fraser's interest; and ten years, as we all know, can work many changes in the history of the world and individuals. In ten years some have been swept clean off the board, and their places taken by others; a few have grown richer, many poorer, some of us sadder, some wiser, and all of us ten years older. Now, this was exactly what had happened to little Angela—that is, the Angela we knew as little, and ten years make curious differences between the slim child of nine and a half and the woman of nearly twenty.

When we last saw her, Angela was about to commence her education. Let us re-introduce ourselves on the memorable evening when, after ten years of study, Mr. Fraser, a master by no means easily pleased, expressed himself unable to teach her any more.

It is Christmas Eve. Drip, drop, drip, falls the rain

from the leafless boughs on to the sodden earth. The apology for day-light that has been doing its dull duty for the last few hours is slowly effacing itself, and the gale is celebrating the fact, and showing its joy at the closing-in of the melancholy night by howling its loudest through the trees, and flogging the flying scud it has brought with it from the sea, till it whirls across the sky like a succession of ghostly racehorses.

This is outside the vicarage; let us look within. In a well-worn armchair in the comfortable study, near to a table covered with books, and holding some loose sheets of foolscap in his hand, sits Mr. Fraser. His hair is a little greyer than when he began Angela's education, about as grey as rather accommodating hair will get at the age of fifty-three; otherwise his general appearance is much the same, and his face is as refined and gentleman-like as ever. Presently he lays down the sheets of paper which he has been studying attentively, and says:

"Your solution is perfectly sound, Angela; but you have arrived at it in a characteristic fashion, and by your own road. Not but what your method has some merits —for one thing, it is more concise than my own; but, on the other hand, it shows feminine weakness. It is not possible to follow every step from your premises to your conclusion, correct as it is."

"Ah!" says a low voice, with a happy ripple in it, the owner of which is busy with some tea-things out of range of the ring of light thrown by the double reading-lamp, "you often blame me for jumping to conclusions; but what does it matter, provided they are right? The whole secret is that I used the equivalent algebraic formula, but suppressed the working in order to puzzle you," and the voice laughed sweetly.

"That is not worthy of a mathematician," said Mr. Fraser, with some irritation; "it is nothing but a trick, a *tour de force.*"

"The solution is correct, you say?"

"Quite."

"Then I maintain that it is perfectly mathematical; the object of mathematics is to arrive at the truth."

"*Vox et præterea nihil.* Come out of the corner, my dear. I hate arguing with a person whom I cannot see. But there, there, what is the use of arguing at all? The fact is, Angela, you are a first-class mathematician, and I am only second-class. I am obliged to stick to the old tracks; you cut a Roman road of your own. Great masters are entitled to do that. That algebraic formula never occurred to me when I worked the problem out, and it took me two days to do."

"You are trying to make me vain. You forget that whatever I know, which is just enough to show me how much I have to learn, I have learnt from you. As for being your superior in mathematics, I don't think that, as a clergyman, you should make such a statement. Here is your tea." And the owner of the voice came forward into the ring of light.

She was tall beyond the ordinary height of woman, and possessed unusual beauty of form, that the tight-fitting grey dress she wore was well calculated to display. Her complexion, which was of a dazzling fairness, was set off by the darkness of the lashes that curled over the deep grey eyes. The face itself was rounded and very lovely, and surmounted by an ample forehead, whilst her hair, which was twisted into a massive knot, was of a tinge of chestnut gold, and marked with deep-set ripples. The charm of her face, however, did not, as is so often the

case, begin and end with its physical attractions. There was more, much more, in it than that. But how is it possible to describe on paper a presence at once so full of grace and dignity, of the soft loveliness of woman, and of a higher and more spiritual beauty? There hangs in the Louvre a picture by Raphael, which represents a saint passing with light steps over the prostrate form of a dragon. There is in that heaven-inspired face, the equal of which has been rarely, if ever, put on canvas, a blending of earthly beauty and of the calm, awe-compelling spirit-gaze—that gaze, that holy dignity which can only come to such as are in truth and in deed "pure in heart" —that will give to those who know it a better idea of what Angela was like than any written description.

At times, but, ah, how rarely! we may have seen some such look as that she wore on the faces of those around us. It may be brought by a great sorrow, or be the companion of an overwhelming joy. It may announce the consummation of some sublime self-sacrifice, or convey the swift assurance of an everlasting love. It is to be found alike on the features of the happy mother as she kisses her new-born babe, and on the pallid countenance of the saint sinking to his rest. The sharp moment which brings us nearer God, and goes nigh to piercing the veil that hides His presence, is the occasion that calls it into being. It is a beauty born of the murmuring sound of the harps of heaven; it is the light of the eternal lamp gleaming faintly through its earthly casket.

This spirit-look, before which all wickedness must feel ashamed, had found a home in Angela's grey eyes. There was a strange nobility about her. Whether it dwelt in the stately form, or on the broad brow, or in the large glance of the deep eyes, it is not possible to say; but it

was certainly a part of herself as self-evident as her face or features. She might well have been the inspiration of the lines that run:

"Truth in her might, belovèd,
Grand in her sway;
Truth with her eyes, belovèd,
Clearer than day;
Holy and pure, belovèd,
Spotless and free;
Is there one thing, belovèd,
Fairer than thee?"

Mr. Fraser absently set down the tea that Angela was giving him when we took the liberty to describe her personal appearance.

"Now, Angela, read a little."

"What shall I read?"

"Oh! anything you like; please yourself."

Thus enjoined she went to a bookshelf, and taking down two volumes, handed one to Mr. Fraser, and then, opening her copy at haphazard, announced the page to her companion, and, sitting down, began to read.

What sound is this, now soft and melodious as the sweep of a summer gale over a southern sea, and now again like to the distant stamp and rush and break of the wave of battle? What can it be but the roll of those magnificent hexameters with which Homer charms a listening world? And rarely have English lips given them with a juster cadence.

"Stop, my dear, shut up your book; you are as good a Greek scholar as I can make you. Shut up your book for the last time. Your education, my dear Angela, is satisfactorily completed. I have succeeded with you——"

"Completed, Mr. Fraser!" said Angela, open-eyed.

"Do you mean to say that I am to stop now just as I have begun to learn?"

"My dear, you have learnt everything that I can teach you; and, besides, I am going away the day after to-morrow."

"Going away!" and then and there without the slightest warning, Angela—who, for all her beauty and learning, very much resembled the rest of her sex—burst into tears.

"Come, come, Angela," said Mr. Fraser, in a voice meant to be gruff, but only succeeded in being husky, for, oddly enough, it is trying even to a clergyman on the wrong side of middle-age to be wept over by a lovely woman; "don't be nonsensical; I am only going for a few months."

At this intelligence she pulled up a little.

"Oh," she said, between her sobs, "how you frightened me! How could you be so cruel! Where are you going to?"

"I am going for a long trip in Southern Europe. Do you know that I have scarcely been away from this place for twenty years; so I mean to celebrate the conclusion of our studies by taking a holiday."

"I wish you would take me with you."

Mr. Fraser coloured slightly, and his eye brightened. He sighed as he answered—

"I am afraid, my dear, that it would be impossible."

Something warned Angela not to pursue the subject.

"Now, Angela, I believe that it is usual, on the occasions of the severance of a scholastic connection, to deliver something in the nature of a farewell oration. Well, I am not going to do that, but I want you to listen to a few words."

She did not answer, but, drawing a stool to the corner of the fireplace, she wiped her eyes and sat down almost

at his feet, clasping her knees with her hands, and gazing rather sadly into the fire.

"You have, dear Angela," he began, "been educated in a somewhat unusual way, with the result that, after ten years of steady work that has been always interesting, though sometimes arduous, you have acquired information denied to the vast majority of your sex, while at the same time you could be put to the blush in many things by a school-girl of fifteen. For instance, though I firmly believe that you could at the present moment take a double first at the University, your knowledge of English literature is almost nil, and your history of the weakest. All a woman's ordinary accomplishments, such as drawing, playing, singing, have of necessity been to a great extent neglected, since I was not able to teach them to you myself, and you have been guided solely by books and the light of Nature in giving to them such time as you could spare.

"Your mind, on the other hand, has been daily saturated with the noblest thoughts of the intellectual giants of two thousand years ago, and would in that respect be as much in place in a well-educated Grecian maiden living before the time of Christ as in an English girl of the nineteenth century.

"I have educated you thus, Angela, partly by accident and partly by design. You will remember when you began to come here some ten years since—you were a little thing then—and I had offered to give you some teaching, because you interested me, and I saw that you were running wild in mind and body. But, when I had undertaken the task, I was somewhat puzzled how to carry it out. It is one thing to offer to educate a little girl, and another to do it. Not knowing where to begin,

I fell back upon the Latin grammar, where I had begun myself, and so by degrees you slid into the curriculum of a classical and mathematical education. Then, after a year or two, I perceived your power of work and your great natural ability, and I formed a design. I said to myself, 'I will see how far a woman cultivated under favourable conditions can go. I will patiently teach this girl till the literature of Greece and Rome becomes as familiar to her as her mother-tongue, till figures and symbols hide no mysteries from her, till she can read the heavens like a book. I will teach her mind to follow the secret ways of knowledge; I will train it till it can soar above its fellows like a falcon above sparrows.' Angela, my proud design, pursued steadily through many years, has been at length accomplished; your bright intellect has risen to the strain I have put upon it, and you are at this moment one of the best all-round scholars of my acquaintance."

She flushed to the eyes at this high praise, and was about to speak, but he stopped her with a motion of the hand, and went on:

"In teaching you I have recognised a fact but too little known, that a classical education, properly understood, is the foundation of all learning. There is little that is worth saying which has not already been beautifully said by the ancients, little that is worthy of meditation on which they have not already profoundly reflected, save, indeed, the one great subject of Christian meditation. This foundation, my dear Angela, you possess to an eminent degree. Henceforth you will need no assistance from me or any other man, for, to your trained mind, all ordinary knowledge will be easy to assimilate. You will receive in the course of a few days

a parting present from myself in the shape of a box of carefully chosen books on European literature and history. Devote yourself, for the next year, to the study of these and of the German language, which was your mother's native tongue, and then I shall consider that you are fairly finished, and then, too, my dear Angela, I shall expect to reap a full reward for my labours."

"What is it that you will expect of me?"

"I shall expect, Angela," and he rose from his chair and walked up and down the room in his excitement—"I shall expect to see you take your proper place in your generation. I shall say: 'Choose your own line, become a critical scholar, a practical mathematician, or—and perhaps that is what you are most suited for with your imaginative powers—a writer of fiction. For remember that fiction, properly understood and directed to worthy aims, is the noblest and most far-reaching, as it is also the most difficult of the arts.' In watching the success that will assuredly attend you in this or any other line, I shall be amply rewarded for my trouble."

Angela shook her head with a gesture of doubt, but he did not wait for her to answer.

"Well, my dear, I must not keep you any longer—it is quite dark and blowing a gale of wind—except to say one more word. Remember that all this is a means to an end—indirectly perhaps, but still none the less truly. There are two educations, the education of the mind and the education of the soul; unless you minister to the latter, all the time and toil spent upon the former will prove to little purpose. The learning will, it is true, remain; but it will be as the quartz out of which the gold has been already crushed, or the dry husks of corn. It will be valueless and turn to no good use, will serve only

to feed the swine of intellectual voluptuousness and infidelity. It is, believe me, the higher learning of the soul that gilds our earthly lore. The loftier object of all education is so to train the intellect that it may become competent to understand something, however little, of the nature of our God, and to the true Christian the real end of learning is the appreciation of His attributes as exemplified in His mysteries and earthly wonders. But perhaps that is a subject on which you are as well fitted to dicourse as I am, so I will not enter into it. 'Finis,' my dear, 'finis.'"

Angela's answer to this long oration was a simple one. She rose slowly from her low seat, and, putting her hands upon Mr. Fraser's shoulders, kissed him on the forehead and said—

"How shall I ever learn to be grateful enough for all I owe you? What should I have been now but for you? How good and patient you have been to me!"

This embrace affected the clergyman strangely; he put his hand to his heart, and a troubled look came into his eyes. Thrusting her gently away from him, he sat down.

"Angela," he said presently, "go away now, dear, I am tired to-night. I shall see you at church to-morrow to say good-bye."

And so she went homewards through the wind and storm, little knowing that she left her master to struggle with a tempest far more tremendous than that which raged around her.

As for him, as the door closed, he gave a sigh of relief.

"Pray God I have not put it off too long," he said to himself. "And now for to-morrow's sermon. Sleep for

the young! laughter for the happy! work for old fools—work, work, work!"

And thus it was that Angela became a scholar.

CHAPTER II.

ARTHUR HEIGHAM.

THE winter months passed away slowly for Angela, but not by any means unhappily. Though she was quite alone and missed Mr. Fraser sadly, she found considerable consolation in his present of books, and in the thought that she was getting a good hold of her new subjects of study. And then came the wonder of the spring with its rush of budding life, and who could be sad in springtime, least of all Angela? But nevertheless that spring marked an important change in our heroine, for it was during its sweet hours, when, having put her books aside, alone, or in company with her ravens, she would roam through the flower-starred woods around the lake, that a feeling of restlessness, amounting at times almost to dissatisfaction, took possession of her. Indeed, as the weeks crept on and she drew near the completion of her twentieth year, she realised with a sigh that she could no longer call herself a girl, and began to feel that her life was incomplete, that something was wanting in it. And this was what was wanting in Angela's life: if we except her nurse, she had no one to love, and she had so much love to give!

Did she but guess it, the still recesses of her heart already tremble to the footfall of one now drawing near: out of the multitude of the lives around her, a life is marked to mingle with her own. She does not know it,

but as the first reflection of the dawn strikes the unconscious sky and shadows the coming of its king, so the red flush that now so often springs unbidden to her brow, tells of girlhood's twilight ended, and proclaims the advent of woman's life and love.

"Angela," called her father one day, as he heard her footsteps passing his study, "come in here; I want to speak to you."

His daughter stopped, and a look of blank astonishment spread itself over her face. She had not been called into that study for years. She entered, however, as bidden. Philip, her father, who was seated at his writing-table, which was piled up with account-books, did not greatly differ in appearance from what he was when we last saw him twenty years ago. His frame had grown more massive, and acquired a slight stoop, but he was still a young, powerful-looking man, and certainly did not appear a day more than his age of forty-two. So long as no one was looking at them, the eyes, however, had contracted a concentrated stare, as though they were eternally gazing at some object in space, and this appearance was rendered the more marked by an apparently permanent puckering of the skin of the forehead. The moment, however, that they came under the fire of anybody else's optics, and, oddly enough, more particularly of those of his own daughter, the stare vanished, and they grew shifty and uncertain to a curious degree.

Philip was employed in adding up something when his daughter entered, and motioned to her to sit down. She did so, and fixed her great grey eyes on him with some curiosity. The effect was remarkable; her father fidgeted, made a mistake in his calculations, glanced all

round the room with his shifty eyes (ah, how changed from those bold black orbs with which Maria Lee fell in love four-and-twenty years ago!) and finally threw down his pen with an exclamation that would have shocked Angela had she understood it.

"How often, Angela, have I asked you not to stare me out of countenance! It is a most unladylike trick of yours."

She blushed painfully.

"I beg your pardon; I forgot. I will look out of the window."

"Don't be a fool; look like other people. But now I want to speak to you. In the first place, I find that the household expenditure for the last year was three hundred and fifty pounds. That is more than I can afford; it must not exceed three hundred this year."

"I will do my best to keep the expenses down, father; but I can assure you that there is no money wasted now."

Then came a pause, which, after humming and hawing a little, Philip was the first to break.

"Do you know that I saw your cousin George yesterday? He is back at last at Isleworth."

"Yes, Pigott told me that he had come. He has been away a long while."

"When did you last see him?"

"When I was about thirteen, I believe; before he lost the election, and went away."

"He has been down here several times since then. I wonder that you did not see him."

"I always disliked him, and kept out of his way."

"Gad! you can't dislike him more than I do; but I keep good friends with him for all that, and you must

do the same. Now, look here, Angela, will you promise to keep a secret?"

"Yes, father, if you wish it."

"Well, then, I appear to be a poor man, don't I? And remember," he added, hastily, "that, with reference to household expenses, I am poor; but, as a matter of fact"—and here he sunk his voice and glanced suspiciously round—"I am worth at this moment nearly one hundred and fifty thousand pounds in hard cash."

"That is six thousand pounds a year at four per cent.," commented Angela, without a moment's hesitation. "Then I really think you might put a flue into the old greenhouse, and allow a shilling a week to Mrs. Jakes' mother."

"Curse Mrs. Jakes' mother! Nobody but a woman would have interrupted with such nonsense. Listen. You must have heard how I was disinherited on account of my marriage with your mother, and the Isleworth estates left to your cousin George, and how, with a refined ingenuity, he was forbidden to bequeath them back to me or to my children. But mark this, he is not forbidden to sell them to me; no doubt the old man never dreamt that I should have the money to buy them; but, you see, I have almost enough."

"How did you get so much money?"

"Get it! First, I took the gold plate my grandfather bought, and sold it. I had no right to do it, but I could not afford to have so much capital lying idle. It fetched nearly five thousand pounds. With this I speculated successfully. In two years I had eighteen thousand. The eighteen thousand I invested in a fourth share in a coal-mine, when money was scarce and coals cheap. Coals rose enormously just then, and in five years' time I sold

my share to the co-holders for eighty-two thousand, in addition to twenty-one thousand received by way of interest. Since then I have not speculated, for fear my luck should desert me. I have simply allowed the money to accumulate on mortgage and other investments, and bided my time, for I have sworn to have those estates back before I die. It is for this cause that I have toiled, and thought, and screwed, and been cut by the whole neighbourhood for twenty years; but now I think that, with your help, my time is coming."

"With *my* help. What is it that you wish me to do?"

"Listen," answered her father, nervously tapping his pencil on the account-book before him. "George is not very fond of Isleworth—in fact, he rather dislikes it; but, like all the Caresfoots, he does not care about parting with landed property, and, though we appear to be good friends, he hates me too much ever to consent, under ordinary circumstances, to sell it to me. It is to you I look to overcome that objection."

"I! How?"

"You are a woman, and ask me how you should get the blind side of a man?"

"I do not in the least understand you."

Philip smiled incredulously.

"Then I suppose I must explain. If you ever take the trouble to look at yourself in the glass, you will probably see that Nature has been very kind to you in the matter of good looks; nor are you by any means deficient in brains. Your cousin George is very fond of a pretty woman, and, to be plain, what I want you to do is to make use of your advantages to get him under your thumb and persuade him into selling the property."

"Oh! father, how can you?" ejaculated Angela, in an agony of shame.

"You idiot, I don't want you to marry him; I only want you to make a fool of him. Surely, being of the sex you are, you won't find *that* an uncongenial occupation."

Angela's blushes had given way to pallor now, and she answered with cold contempt:

"I don't think you quite understand what a girl feels —at least, what I feel, for I know no other girls. Perhaps it would be useless for me to try to explain. I had rather go blind than use my eyes to such a shameful purpose."

"Angela," said her father, with as much temper as he ever showed now, "let me tell you that you are a silly fool; you are more, you are an encumbrance. Your birth," he added, bitterly, "robbed me of your mother, and the fact of your being a girl deprived our branch of the family of their rights. Now that you have grown up, you prefer to gratify your whims rather than help me to realise the object of my life by a simple course of action that could do no one any harm. I never asked you to commit yourself in any way. Well, well, it is what I might expect. We have not seen much of each other heretofore, and perhaps the less we meet in the future the better."

"You have no right to talk to me so," she answered, with flashing eyes, "though I am your daughter, and it is cowardly to reproach me with my birth, my sex, and my dependence. Am I responsible for any of these things? But I will not burden you long. And as to what you wanted me to do, and think such a little of, I ask you, is it what my poor mother would have wished her daughter——"

Here Philip abruptly rose, and left the room and the house.

"She is as like her mother as possible," he mused, as soon as he was clear of the house. "It might have been Hilda herself, only she is twice as beautiful as Hilda was. I shall have another bad night after this, I know I shall. I must get rid of that girl somehow, I cannot bear her about me; she is a daily reminder of things I dare not remember, and whenever she stares at me with those great eyes of hers, I feel as though she were looking through me. I wonder if she knows the story of Maria Lee!"

And then dismissing, or trying to dismiss, the matter from his mind, he took his way across the fields to Isleworth Hall, a large white brick mansion in the Queen Anne style, situated about two miles distant from the Abbey. On arrival, he asked for his cousin George, and was at once shown into that gentleman's presence.

Years had told upon George more than they had upon Philip, and, though there were no touches of grey in the flaming red of his hair, the bloodshot eyes, and the puckered crowsfeet beneath them, to say nothing of the slight but constant trembling of the hand, all showed that he was a man well on in middle-life, and who had lived every day of it. Time, too, had made the face more intensely unpleasant and vulgar-looking than ever. Such Caresfoot characteristics as it possessed, year by year were giving place, in an increasingly greater degree, to the kitchen-maid strain introduced by the mother. In short, George Caresfoot did not even look a gentleman, whereas Philip certainly did.

"You don't seem very well, George. I am afraid that your travels have not agreed with you."

"My dear Philip," answered his cousin, in a languid and affected voice, "if you had lived the life that I have for the last twenty years, you would look a little knocked up. I have had some very good times; but the fact is, that I have been too prodigal of my strength, not thought enough about the future. It is a great mistake, and one of the worst results is that I am utterly *blasé* of everything; even *la belle passion* is played out of me. I haven't seen a woman I care twopence about for ten years."

"Ah! you should sell this place, and take a house in town; it would suit you much better."

"I can do that without selling the place. I don't intend to sell the place—in fact, nothing would induce me to do so. Some day I may marry, and want to transmit it to some future Caresfoot, but I confess I don't mean to do that just yet. Marry when you want a nurse, but never before; that's my maxim. Marriage is an excellent institution for parsons and fools, the two classes that Providence has created to populate the world; but a wise man should as soon think of walking into a spring-trap. Take your own case, for instance, my dear Philip; look what marriage led to."

"At any rate," answered his cousin, bitterly, "it led to your advantage."

"Exactly; and that is one of the reasons why I have such a respect for the institution in the abstract. It has been my personal benefactor, and I worship it accordingly—at a distance. By the way, talking of marriage reminds me of its legitimate fruits. Bellamy tells me that your daughter Angela (if I had a daughter, I should call her Diabola, it is more appropriate for a woman) has grown uncommonly handsome. Bring her to see me; I

adore beauty in all its forms, especially its female form. Is she really so handsome?"

"I am no judge, but you will soon have an opportunity of forming an opinion—that is, I hope so. I propose coming with Angela to make a formal call on you to-morrow."

"Good. Tell my fair cousin that I shall be certain to be in, and be prepared, metaphorically, to fall at the feet of so much loveliness. By the way, that reminds me; you have heard of Bellamy's, or rather Mrs. Bellamy's, good fortune, I suppose?"

"No."

"What—no? Why, he is now Sir John Bellamy, knight."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"You remember the bye-election six months back?"

"Oh, yes! I was actually badgered by Mrs. Bellamy into promising to vote, much against my personal convenience."

"Exactly. Well, just at the time old Prescott died, you may remember that Mr. Showers, the member of the Government, was unseated on petition from some borough or other, and came down here post-haste to get re-elected. But he had Sir Percy Vivyan against him, and, as I knew to my cost, this benighted county is not fond of those who preach the gospel of progress. Bellamy, who is a stout Radical, as you know—chiefly, I fancy, because there is more to be made out of that side of politics—got the job as Showers' agent. But, three days before, it became quite clear that his cause was hopeless, cabinet minister or not. Then it was that Mrs.—I beg her pardon, Lady—Bellamy came to the fore. Just as Showers was thinking of withdrawing, she demanded a

private interview with him. Next day she posted off to old Sir Percy, who is a perfect fool of the chivalrous school, and was desperately fond of her, and, *mirabile dictu,* that evening Sir Percy withdraws on the plea of ill-health, or some such rubbish, and Showers walks over. Within three months, Mr. Bellamy becomes Sir John Bellamy, nominally for his services as town-clerk of Roxham, and I hear that old Sir Percy is now perfectly rampant, and goes about cursing her ladyship up hill and down dale, and declaring that he has been shockingly taken in. How our mutual friend worked the ropes is more than I can tell you, but she did work them, and to some purpose."

"She is an uncommonly handsome woman."

"Ah! yes, you're right there, she is A1; but let us stroll out a little; it is a fine evening for the 30th of April. To-morrow will be the 1st of May, so it will, a day neither of us are likely to forget."

Philip winced at the allusion, but said nothing.

"By the way," George went on, "I am expecting a visitor, my ward, young Arthur Heigham, who is just back from India. He will be twenty-five in a few days, when he comes of age, and is coming down to settle up. The fact is, that ten thousand of his money is on that Jotley property, and both Bellamy and myself are anxious that it should stop there for the present, as if the mortgage were called in it might be awkward."

"Is he well off?"

"Comfortably; about a thousand a year; comes of an old family too. Bellamy and I knew his father, Captain Heigham, slightly, when we were in business. His wife, by the way, was a distant cousin of ours. They are both dead now; the captain was wiped out at Inkerman, and, for some unknown reason, left me the young gentleman's

sole guardian and joint trustee with a London lawyer, a certain Mr. Borley. I have never seen him yet—my ward, I mean—he has always been at Eton, or Cambridge, or in India, or somewhere."

Here Philip began to manifest signs of considerable uneasiness, the cause of which was sufficiently apparent; for, whilst they were talking, a very large and savage-looking animal of the sheep-dog order had emerged from the house, and was following him up and down, growling in a low and ominous undertone, its nose being the while glued to his calves as they alternately presented themselves in his line of vision.

"Would you mind calling off this animal, George?" he said at length. "He does not look amiable."

"Oh! that's Snarleyow; don't mind him, he never bites unless you stop." Philip instinctively quickened his pace. "Isn't he a beauty? He's a pure bred Thibet sheep-dog, and I will back him to fight against any animal of his own weight. He killed two dogs in one morning the other day, and pulled down a beggar woman in the evening. You should have heard her scream."

At that moment, fortunately for Philip's calves, which were beginning to tingle with an unwholesome excitement, Mr. Snarleyow's attention was diverted by the approach of a dog-cart, and he left to enjoy the amusement of snapping and barking at the horse. The cart pulled up at the door, and out of it emerged a tall and extremely gentlemanly-looking young fellow, followed by a very large red bull-dog.

"Mr. Caresfoot, I believe," said the young gentleman to George, taking off his hat.

"Yes, Mr. Heigham, at your service. I am very glad to see you. My cousin, Mr. Philip Caresfoot."

CHAPTER III.

THE FATE OF SNARLEYOW.

"I MUST apologise for having brought Aleck, my dog, you know, with me," began Arthur Heigham; "but the fact was, that at the very last moment the man I was going to leave him with was obliged to go away, and I had no time to find another place before the train left. I thought, if you objected to dogs, that he could easily be sent somewhere into the village. He is very good-tempered, though appearances are against him."

"Oh! he will be all right, I daresay," said George, rather sulkily; for, with the exception of Snarleyow, in whose fiendish temper he found something refreshing and congenial, he liked no dogs. "But you must be careful, or Snarleyow, *my* dog, will give him a hammering. Here, good dog, good dog," and he attempted to pat Aleck on the head, but the animal growled savagely, and avoided him.

"I never knew him do that before," ejaculated Arthur, in confusion, and heartily wishing Aleck somewhere else. "I suppose he has taken a dislike to you. Dogs do sometimes, you know."

Next second it struck him that this was one of those things that had better have been left unsaid, and he grew more uncomfortable than ever. But at this very moment the situation was rendered intensely lively by the approach of the redoubtable Snarleyow himself, who, having snapped at the horse's heels all the way to the stables, had on his return to the front of the house spotted Aleck from afar. He was now advancing on tiptoe in full order of battle, his wicked-looking teeth

gleaming, and his coat and tail standing out like an angry bear's.

Arthur, already sufficiently put out about the dog question, thought it best to take no notice; and even when he distinctly heard George quietly "sah" on his dog as he passed him, he contented himself with giving Aleck a kick by way of a warning to behave himself, and entered into some desultory conversation with Philip. But presently a series of growls behind him announced that an encounter was imminent. Looking round, he perceived that Snarleyow was standing over the bull-dog, of which he was more than twice the size, and holding on to the skin of his neck with his long teeth: whilst George was looking on with scarcely suppressed amusement.

"I think, Mr. Caresfoot, that you had better call your dog off," said Arthur, good-temperedly. "Mine is a peaceable animal, but he is an awkward customer when he does fight."

"Oh! better let them settle it; they will be much better friends afterwards. Hold him, Snarleyow!"

Thus encouraged, the big dog seized the other, and fairly lifted him off the ground, shaking him violently—a proceeding that had the effect of thoroughly rousing Aleck's temper. And then began a most Homeric combat. At first the bull-dog was dreadfully mauled; his antagonist's size, weight, and length of leg and jaw, to say nothing of the thick coat by which he was protected, all telling against him. But he took his punishment very quietly, never so much as uttering a growl, in strange contrast to the big dog's vociferous style of doing business. And at last patience was rewarded by his enemy's fore-paw finding its way into Aleck's powerful jaw, and remaining there till Snarleyow's attentions to the back of

his neck forced him to shift his hold. From that time forward the sheep-dog had to fight on three legs, which he found demoralising. But still he had the advantage, and it was not until any other dog of Aleck's size would have retreated half killed that the bull-dog's superior courage and stamina began to tell. Quite heedless of his injuries, and the blood that poured into his eyes, he slowly but surely drove the great sheep-dog, who by this time would have been glad to stop, back into an angle of the wall, and then suddenly pinned him by the throat. Down went Snarleyow on the top of the bull-dog, and rolled right over him, but when he staggered to his legs again, his throat was still in its cruel grip.

"Take your dog off!" shouted George, seeing that affairs had taken a turn he very little expected.

"I fear that is impossible," replied Arthur, politely, but looking anything but polite.

"If you don't get it off, I will shoot it."

"You will do nothing of the sort, Mr. Caresfoot; you set the dog on, and you must take the consequences. Ah! the affair is finished."

As he spoke, the choking Snarleyow, whose black tongue was protruding from his jaws, gave one last convulsive struggle, and ceased to breathe. Satisfied with this result, Aleck let go, and having sniffed contemptuously at his dead antagonist, returned to his master's side, and, sitting quietly down, began to lick such of his numerous wounds as he could reach.

George, when he realised that his favourite was dead, turned upon his guest in a perfect fury. His face looked like a devil's. But Arthur, acting with wonderful self-possession for so young a man, stopped him.

"Remember, Mr. Caresfoot, before you say anything

that you may regret, that neither I nor my dog is to blame for what has happened. I am exceedingly sorry that your dog should have been killed, but it is your own fault. I am afraid, however, that, after what has happened, I shall be as unwelcome here as Aleck; so, if you will kindly order the cart for me again, I will move on. Our business can no doubt be finished off by letter."

George made no reply: it was evident that he could not trust himself to speak, but, turning suddenly on his heel, walked towards the house.

"Wait a bit, Mr. Heigham," said Philip, who had been watching the whole scene with secret delight. "You are perfectly in the right. I will go and try to bring my cousin to his senses. I am very thankful to your dog for killing that accursed brute."

He was away for about ten minutes, during which Arthur took Aleck to a fountain there was in the centre of a grass plot in front of the house, and washed his many wounds, none of which, however, thanks to the looseness of his hide, were very serious. Just as he had finished that operation, a gardener arrived with a wheel-barrow to fetch away the deceased Snarleyow.

"Lord, sir," he said to Arthur, "I am glad to have the job of tucking up this here brute. He bit my missus last week, and killed a whole clutch of early ducks. I seed the row through the bushes. That 'ere dog of yours, sir, he did fight in proper style; I should like to have a dog like he."

Just then the re-arrival of Philip put a stop to the conversation. Drawing Arthur aside, he told him that George begged to apologise for what had occurred, and hoped that he would not think of going away.

"But," added Philip with a little laugh, "I don't

pretend that he has taken a fancy to you, and, if I were you, I should cut my visit short."

"That is exactly my view of the case. I will leave to-morrow evening."

Philip made no further remarks for a few moments. He was evidently thinking. Presently he said—

"I see you have a fishing-rod amongst your things; if you find the time hang heavy on your hands to-morrow, or wish to keep out of the way, you had better come over to Bratham Lake and fish. There are some very large carp and perch there, and pike, too, for the matter of that, but they are out of season."

Arthur thanked him, and said that he should probably come, and, having received instructions as to the road, they parted, Arthur to go and shut up Aleck in an outhouse pointed out to him by his friend the gardener, and thence to dress for a dinner that he looked forward to with dread, and Philip to make his way home. As he passed up through the little flower-garden at the Abbey House, he came across his daughter, picking the blight from her shooting rose-trees.

"Angela," he said, "I am sorry if I offended your prejudices this afternoon. Don't let us say anything more about it; but I want you to come and pay a formal call with me at Isleworth to-morrow. It will only be civil that you should do so."

"I never paid a call in my life," she answered, doubtfully, "and I don't want to call on my cousin George."

"Oh! very well," and he began to move on. She stopped him.

"I will go, if you like."

"At three o'clock, then. Oh! by the way, don't be surprised if you see a young gentleman fishing here to-morrow."

Angela reflected to herself that she had never yet seen a young gentleman to speak to in her life, and then asked, with undisguised interest, who he was.

"Well, he is a sort of connection of your own, through the Prestons, who are cousins of ours, if any of them are left. His mother was a Preston, and his name is Arthur Preston Heigham. George told me something about him just now, and, on thinking it over, I remember the whole story. He is an orphan, and George's ward."

"What is he like?" asked Angela, ingenuously.

"Really I don't know; rather tall, I think—a gentlemanly fellow. It really is a relief to speak to a gentleman again. There has been a nice disturbance at Isleworth," and then he told his daughter the history of the great dog fight.

"I should think Mr. Heigham was perfectly in the right, and I should like to see his dog," was her comment on the occurrence.

As Arthur dressed himself for dinner that evening he came to the conclusion that he disliked his host more than any man he ever saw, and, to say the truth, he descended into the dining-room with considerable misgivings. Just as he entered, the opposite door opened, and Sir John Bellamy was announced. On seeing him, George emerged from the sulky silence into which he was plunged, and advanced to meet him.

"Hullo, Bellamy! I must congratulate you upon your accession to rank."

"Thank you, Caresfoot, thank you," replied Mr. Bellamy, who, with the exception that he had grown a size larger, and boasted a bald patch on the top of his head that gave him something of the appearance of a jolly

little monk, looked very much the same as when we last saw him as a newly married man.

"A kind Providence," he went on, rubbing his dry hands, and glancing nervously under the chairs, "has put this honour into my hands."

"A Providence in petticoats, you mean," broke in George.

"Possibly, my dear Caresfoot; but I do not see him. Is it possible that he is lurking yonder, behind the sofa?"

"Who on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that exceedingly fine dog of yours, Snarleyow. Snarleyow, where are you? Excuse me for taking precautions, but last time he put his head under my chair and bit me severely, as I daresay you remember."

Arthur groaned at hearing the subject thus brought forward.

"Mr. Heigham's dog killed Snarleyow this afternoon," said George, in a savage voice.

At this intelligence, Sir John's face became wreathed in smiles.

"I am deeply delighted—I mean grieved—to hear it. Poor Snarleyow! he was a charming dog; and to think that such a fate should have overtaken him, when it was only last week that he did the same kind office for Anne's spaniel. Poor Snarleyow! you should really have him stuffed. But, my dear Caresfoot, you have not yet introduced me to the hero of the evening, Mr. Heigham. Mr. Heigham, I am delighted to make your acquaintance," and he shook hands with Arthur with gentle enthusiasm, as though he were the last scion of a race that he had known and loved for generations.

Presently dinner was announced, and the three sat down at a small round table in the centre of the big

dining-room, on which was placed a shaded lamp. It was not a cheerful dinner. George, having said grace, relapsed into moody silence, eating and drinking with gusto but in moderation, and savouring every sip of wine and morsel of food as though he regretted its departure. He was not free from gluttony, but he was a judicious glutton. For his part, Arthur found a certain fascination in watching his guardian's red head as he bobbed up and down opposite to him, and speculating on the thickness of each individual hair that contributed to give it such a spiky effect. What had his mother been like, he wondered, that she had started him in life with such an entirely detestable countenance? Meanwhile he was replying in monosyllables to Sir John's gentle babblings, till at last even that gentleman's flow of conversation ran dry, and Arthur was left free to contemplate the head in solemn silence. As soon as the cloth had been cleared away, George suggested that they had better get to work. Arthur assented, and Sir John, smiling with much sweetness, remarked profoundly that business was one of the ills of life, and must be attended to.

"At any rate, it is an ill that has agreed uncommonly well with you," growled George, as, rising from the table, he went to a solid iron safe that stood in the corner of the room, and, unlocking it with a small key which he took from his pocket, extracted a bundle of documents.

"That is an excellent deed-box of yours, Caresfoot," said Sir John, carelessly.

"Yes; that lock would not be very easy to pick. It is made on my own design."

"But don't you find that small parcels such as private letters are apt to get lost in it? It is so big."

"Oh! no; there is a separate compartment for them.

Now, Mr. Heigham." And then, with the able and benign assistance of Sir John, he proceeded to utterly confuse and mystify Arthur, till stocks, preference-shares, consols, and mortgages were all whirling in his bewildered brain. Having satisfactorily reduced him to this condition, he suddenly sprang upon him the proposal he had in view with reference to the Jotley mortgage, pointing out to him that it was an excellent investment, and strongly advising him, "as a friend," to leave the money upon the land. Arthur hesitated a little, more from natural caution than anything he could urge to the contrary, and George, noticing it, said—

"It is only right that, before you come to any decision, you should see the map of the estate, and a copy of the deed. I have both in the next room, if you care to come and look at them."

Arthur assented, and they went off together; Sir John, whose eyes appeared to be a little heavy under the influence of the port, presuming that he was not wanted. But, no sooner had the door closed, than the worthy knight proved himself very wide-awake. Indeed, he entered on a singular course of action. Advancing on tiptoe to the safe in the corner of the room, he closely inspected it through his eyeglass. Then he cautiously tried the lid of an artfully contrived subdivision.

"Um!" he muttered, half aloud, "that's where they are; I wish I had ten minutes."

Next he returned swiftly to the table, and, taking a piece of the soft bread which he was eating instead of biscuit with his wine, he rapidly kneaded it into dough, and, going to the safe, divided the material into two portions. One portion he carefully pressed upon the key-hole of the subdivision, and then, extracting the key of

the safe itself, took a very fair impress of its wards on the other. This done, he carefully put the pieces of dough in his breast-pocket, in such a way that they were not likely to be crushed, and, with a smile of satisfaction, returned to his chair, helped himself to a glass of port, and dozed off.

"Hullo, Bellamy, gone to sleep! Wake up, man! We have settled this business about the mortgage. Will you write to Mr. Borley, and convey Mr. Heigham's decision? And perhaps"—addressing Arthur—"you will do the same on your own account?"

"Certainly I will write, Caresfoot; and now I think that I must be off. Her ladyship does not like having to sit up for me."

George laughed in a peculiarly insulting way.

"I don't think she would care much, Bellamy, if you stayed away all night. But look here, tell her I want to see her to-morrow; don't forget."

Sir John bit his knightly lip, but answered, smiling, that he would remember, and begging George not to ring, as his trap was at the hall-door, and the servant waiting, he bade an affectionate good-night to Arthur, to whom he expressed a hope that they would soon meet again, and let himself out of the room. But, as soon as the door was closed, he went through another performance exceedingly inappropriate in a knight. Turning round, his smug face red with anger, he pirouetted on his toes, and shook his fist violently in the direction of the door.

"You scoundrel!" he said between his teeth, "you have made a fool of me for twenty years, and I have been obliged to grin and bear it; but I will be even with you yet, and her too, more especially with her."

So soon as Sir John had left, Arthur told his host

that, if the morning was fine, he proposed to go and fish in Bratham Lake, and that he also proposed to take his departure by the last train on the following evening. To these propositions George offered no objection—indeed, they were distinctly agreeable to him, as lessening the time he would be forced to spend in the society of a guest he cordially detested, for such was the feeling that he had conceived towards Arthur.

Then they parted for the night; but, before he left the room, George went to lock up the safe that was still open in the corner. Struck by some thought, he unlocked the separate compartment with a key that hung on his watch-chain, and extracted therefrom a thick and neatly folded packet of letters. Drawing out one or two, he glanced through them and replaced them.

"Oh! Lady Anne, Lady Anne," he said to himself as he closed the case, "you are up in the world now, and you aspire to rule the county society, and have both the wealth and the wit to do it; but you must not kick over the traces, or I shall be forced to suppress you, Lady Anne, though you are the wife of a Brummagem knight, and I think that it is time you had a little reminder. You are growing a touch too independent."

CHAPTER IV.

ARTHUR FALLS IN LOVE.

ARTHUR'S sleep was oppressed that night by horrible nightmares of fighting dogs, whereof the largest and most ferocious was fitted with George's red head, the effect of which, screwed, without any eye to the fitness of things, to the body of the deceased Snarleyow, struck him as peculiarly disagreeable. He himself was armed with a

gun, and whilst he was still arguing with Sir John Bellamy the nice point whether, should he execute that particular animal, as he felt a carnal longing to do, it would be manslaughter or dogslaughter, he found himself wide awake.

It was very early in the morning of the 1st of May, and, contrary to the usual experience of the inhabitants of these islands, the sky gave promise of a particularly fine day, just the day for fishing. He did not feel sleepy, and, had he done so, he had had enough of his doggy dreams; so he got up, dressed, and taking his fishing-rod, let himself out of the house as he had been instructed to do on the previous evening, and, releasing Aleck from his outhouse, proceeded towards Bratham Lake.

And about this time Angela woke up too, for she always rose early, and ran to the window to see what sort of a day she had got for her birthday. Seeing it to be so fine, she threw open the old lattice, at which her pet raven Jack was already tapping to be admitted, and let the sweet air play upon her face and neck, and thought what a wonderful thing it was to be twenty years old. And then, kneeling by the window, she said her prayers after her own fashion, thanking God who had spared her to see this day, and praying Him to show her what to do with her life, and, if it was His will, to make it a little less lonely. Then she rose and dressed herself, feeling that now that she had done with her teens, she was in every respect a woman grown—indeed, quite old. And, in honour of the event, she chose out of her scanty store of dresses, all of them made by Pigott and herself, her very prettiest, the one she had had for Sunday wear last summer, a tight-fitting robe of white stuff, with soft little frills round the neck and wrists. Next

she put on a pair of stout boots calculated to keep out the morning dew, and started.

Now all this had taken a good time, nearly an hour perhaps; for, being her birthday, and there having been some mention of a young gentleman who might possibly come to fish, she had plaited up her shining hair with extra care, a very laborious business, when your hair hangs down to the knees.

Meanwhile our other early riser, Arthur, had made his way first to the foot of the lake and then along the little path that skirted its area till he came to Caresfoot Staff. Having sufficiently admired that majestic oak, for he was a great lover of timber, he proceeded to investigate the surrounding water with the eye of a true fisherman. A few yards further up there jutted into the lake that fragment of wall on which stood the post, now quite rotten, to which Angela had bound herself on the day of the great storm. At his feet, too, the foundations of another wall ran out for some distance into the lake, being, doubtless, the underpinning of an ancient boathouse, but this did not rise out of the water, it stopped within six inches of the surface. Between these two walls lay a very deep pool.

"Just the place for a heavy fish," reflected Arthur, and, even as he thought it, he saw a five-pound carp rise nearly to the surface, in order to clear the obstruction of the wall, and sink silently into the depths.

Retiring carefully to one of two quaintly carven stone blocks placed at the foot of the oak-tree, on which, doubtless, many a monk had sat in meditation, he set himself to get his fishing-gear together. Presently, however, struck by the beauty of the spot and its quiet, only broken by the songs of many nesting birds, he stopped a while to

look around him. Above his head the branches of the great oak, now clothing themselves with the most vivid green, formed a dome-like roof, beneath the shade of which grew the softest moss, starred here and there with primroses and violets. Outside the circle of its shadow the brushwood of mingled hazel and ash-stubs rose thick and high, ringing-in the little spot as with a wall, except where its depths were pierced by the passage of a long green lane of limes that, unlike the shrubberies, appeared to be kept in careful order, and of which the arching boughs formed a perfect leafy tunnel. Before him lay the lake where the long morning lights quivered and danced, as its calm was now and again ruffled by a gentle breeze. The whole scene had a lovely and peaceful look, and, gazing on it, Arthur fell into a reverie.

Sitting thus dreamily, his face looked at its best, its expression of gentle thoughtfulness giving it an attraction beyond what it was entitled to, judged purely from a sculptor's point of view. It was an intellectual face, a face that gave signs of great mental possibilities, but for all that a little weak about the mouth. The brow indicated some degree of power, and the mouth and eyes no small capacities for affection and all sorts of human sympathy and kindness. These last, in varying lights, could change as often as the English climate; their groundwork, however, was blue, and they were honest and bonny. In short, a man in looking at Arthur Heigham at the age of twenty-four would have reflected that, even among English gentlemen, he was remarkable for his gentlemanlike appearance, and a "fellow one would like to know;" a girl would have dubbed him "nice-looking;" and a middle-aged woman—and most women do not really understand the immense difference between men

until they are getting on that way—would have recognised in him a young man by no means uninteresting, and one who might, according to the circumstances of his life, develop into anything or—nothing in particular.

Presently, drawn by some unguessed attraction, Arthur took his eyes off an industrious water-hen, who was building a nest in a hurried way, as though she were not quite sure of his intentions, and perceived a large raven standing on one leg on the grass, about three yards from him, and peering at him comically out of its right eye. This was odd. But his glance did not stop at the raven, for a yard or two beyond it he caught sight of a white skirt, and his eyes travelling upwards, saw first a rounded waist, and then a bust and pair of shoulders such as few women can boast, and at last, another pair of eyes; and he then and there fell utterly and irretrievably in love.

"Good heavens!" he said, aloud—poor fellow, he did not mean to say it, it was wrung from the depth of his heart—"good heavens, how lovely she is!"

Let any one, if he can, imagine the dreadful confusion produced in that other pair of eyes at the open expression of such a sentiment, and the vivid blush that stained the fair face in which they were set. But somehow they did not become angry—perhaps it was not in the nature of the most sternly repressive young lady to grow angry at a compliment which, however marked, was so evidently genuine and unpremeditated. In another moment Arthur bethought him of what he had said, and it was his turn to blush. He recovered himself pretty well, however. Rising from his stone seat, he took off his hat, and said, humbly—

"I beg your pardon, but you startled me so, and

really for a moment I thought that you were the spirit of the place; or," he added, gracefully pointing to a branch of half-opened hawthorn bloom she held in her hand, "the original Queen of the May."

Angela blushed again. The compliment was only implied this time; she had therefore no possible pretext for getting angry.

For a moment she dropped the sweet eyes that looked as though they were fresh from reading the truths of heaven, before his gaze of unmistakable admiration, and stood confused, and, as she stood, it struck Arthur that there was something more than mere beauty of form and feature about her—an indescribable something, a glory of innocence, a reflection of God's own light that tinged the worship her loveliness commanded with a touch of reverential awe.

"The angels must look like that," he thought. But he had no time to think any more, for next moment she had gathered up her courage in both her hands, and was speaking to him in a soft voice, of which the tones went ringing on through all the changes of his life.

"My father told me that he had asked you to come and fish, but I did not expect to meet you so early. I—I fear that I am disturbing you," and she made as though she would be going.

Arthur felt that this was a contingency to be prevented at all hazards.

"You are Miss Caresfoot," he said, hurriedly, "are you not?"

"Yes—I am Angela; I need not ask your name, my father told it me. You are Mr. Arthur Heigham."

"Yes. And do you know that we are cousins?" This was a slight exaggeration, but he was glad to

advance any plea to her confidence that occurred to him.

"Yes; my father said something about our being related. I have no relations except my cousin George, and I am very glad to make the acquaintance of one," and she held out her hand to him in a winning way.

He took it almost reverently.

"You cannot," he said, with much sincerity, "be more glad than I am. I, too, am without relations. Till lately I had my mother, but she died last year."

"Were you very fond of her?" she asked, softly.

He nodded in reply, and, feeling instinctively that she was on delicate ground, Angela pursued the conversation no further.

Meanwhile Aleck had awoke from a comfortable sleep in which he was indulging on the other stone seat, and coming forward, sniffed at Angela and wagged his tail in approval—a liberty that was instantly resented by the big raven, who had now been joined by another not quite so large. Advancing boldly, it pecked him sharply on the tail—a proceeding that caused Master Aleck to jump round as quickly as his maimed condition would allow him, only to receive a still harder peck from its companion bird; indeed, it was not until Angela intervened with the bough of hawthorn that they would cease from their attack.

"They are such jealous creatures," she explained; "they always follow me about, and fly at every dog that comes near me. Poor dog! that is the one, I suppose, who killed Snarleyow. My father told me all about it."

"Yes, it is easy to see that," said Arthur, laughing, and pointing to Aleck, who, indeed, was in lamentable case, having one eye entirely closed, a large strip of

plaster on his head, and all the rest of his body more or less marked with bites. "It is an uncommonly awkward business for me, and your cousin will not forgive it in a hurry, I fancy; but it really was not poor Aleck's fault—he is gentle as a lamb, if only he is let alone."

"He has a very honest face, though his nose does look as though it were broken," she said, and, stooping down, she patted the dog.

"But I must be going in to breakfast," she went on, presently. "It is eight o'clock; the sun always strikes that bough at eight in spring;" and she pointed to a dead limb, half hidden by the budding foliage of the oak.

"You must observe closely to have noticed that, but I do not think that the sun is quite on it yet. I do not like to lose my new-found relations in such a hurry," he added, with a somewhat forced smile, "and I am to go away from here this evening."

The intelligence was evidently very little satisfactory to Angela, nor did she attempt to conceal her concern.

"I am very sorry to hear it," she said. "I hoped you were going to stay for some time."

"And so I might, had it not been for that brute Aleck, but he has put a long sojourn with your cousin and the ghost of Snarleyow out of the question; so I suppose I must go by the 6.20 train. At any rate," he added, more brightly, as a thought struck him, "I must go from Isleworth."

She did not appear to see the drift of the last part of his remark, but answered—

"I am going with my father to call at Isleworth at three this afternoon, so perhaps we shall meet again there; but now, before I go in, I will show you a better

place than this to fish, a little higher up, where Jakes, our gardener, always sets his night-lines."

Arthur assented, as he would have been glad to assent to anything likely to prolong the interview, and they walked off slowly together, talking as cheerfully as a sense that the conversation must soon come to an end would allow. The spot was reached all too soon, and Angela with evident reluctance, for she was not accustomed to conceal her feelings, said that she must now go.

"Why must you go so soon?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, to-day is my birthday—I am twenty to-day—and I know that Pigott, my old nurse, means to give me a little present at breakfast, and she will be dreadfully disappointed if I am late. She has been thinking a great deal about it, you see."

"May I wish you many, very many, happy returns of the day? and"—with a little hesitation—"may I also offer you a present, a very worthless one I fear."

"How can I——" stammered Angela, when he cut her short.

"Don't be afraid; it is nothing tangible, though it is something that you may not think worth accepting."

"What do you mean?" she said bluntly, for her interest was aroused.

"Don't be angry. My present is only the offer of myself as your sincere friend."

She blushed vividly as she answered—

"You are very kind. I have never had but one friend—Mr. Fraser; but, if you think you can like me enough, it will make me very happy to be your friend too." And in another second she was gone, with her ravens flying after her, to receive her present and a jobation from Pigott for being late, and to eat her breakfast with

such appetite as an entirely new set of sensations can give.

In the garden she met her father, walking up and down before the house, and informed him that she had been talking to Mr. Heigham. He looked up with a curious expression of interest.

"Why did you not ask him in to breakfast?" he said.

"Because there is nothing to eat except bread and milk."

"Ah!—well, perhaps you were right. I will go down and speak to him. No; I forgot I shall see him this afternoon."

And Arthur, let those who disbelieve in love at first sight laugh if they will, sat down to think, trembling in every limb, utterly shaken by the inrush of a new and strong emotion. He had not come to the age of twenty-four without some experiences of the other sex, but never before had he known any such sensation as that which now overpowered him, never before had he fully realised what solitude meant as he did now that she had left him. In youth, when love does come, he comes as a strong man armed.

And so, steady and overwhelming all resistance, the full tide of a pure passion poured itself into his heart. There was no pretence or make-believe about it; the bolt that sped from Angela's grey eyes had gone straight home, and would remain an "ever-fixed mark," so long as life should last.

For only once in a lifetime does a man succumb after this fashion. To many, indeed, no such fortune—call it good or ill—will ever come, since the majority of men flirt or marry, indulge in "platonic friendships," or in a consistent course of admiration of their neighbours' wives,

as fate or fancy leads them, and wear their time away without ever having known the meaning of such love as this. There is no fixed rule about it; the most unlikely, even the more sordid and contemptible of mankind, are liable to become the subjects of an enduring passion; only then it raises them; for though strong affection, especially if unrequited, sometimes wears and enervates the mind, in the main its influence is undoubtedly ennobling. But, though such affection is bounded by no rule, it is curious to observe how generally true are the old sayings which declare that a man's thoughts return to his first real love, as naturally and unconsciously as the needle, that has for a while been drawn aside by some overmastering influence, returns to its magnetic pole. The needle has wavered, but it has never shaken off its allegiance; that would be against nature, and is therefore impossible; and so it is with the heart. It is the eyes that he loved as a lad which he sees through the gathering darkness of his death-bed; it is a chance but that he will always adore the star which first came to share his loneliness in this shadowed world above all the shining multitudes in heaven.

And, though it is not every watcher who will find it, early or late, that star may rise for him, as it did for Arthur now. A man may meet a face which it is quite beyond his power to forget, and be touched of lips that print their kiss upon his very heart. Yes, the star may rise, to pursue its course, perhaps beyond the ken of his horizon, or only to set again before he has learnt to understand its beauty—rarely, very rarely, to shed its perfect light upon him for all his time of watching. The star may rise and set; the sweet lips whose touch still thrills him after so many years may lie to-day

"Beyond the graveyard's barren wall,"

or, worse still, have since been sold to some richer owner. But if once it has risen, if once those lips have met, the memory *must* remain; the Soul knows no forgetfulness, and, the little thread of life spun out, will it not claim its own? For the compact that it has sealed is holy among holy things; that love which it has given is of its own nature, and not of the body alone—it is inscrutable as death, and everlasting as the heavens.

Yes, the fiat has gone forth; for good or for evil, for comfort or for scorn, for the world and for eternity, he loves her! Henceforth that love, so lightly and yet so irredeemably given, will become the guiding spirit of his inner life, rough-hewing his destinies, directing his ends, and shooting its memories and hopes through the whole fabric of his being like an interwoven thread of gold. He may sin against it, but he can never forget it; other interests and ties may overlay it, but they cannot extinguish it; he may drown its fragrance in voluptuous scents, but, when these have satiated and become hateful, it will re-arise, pure and sweet as ever. Time or separation cannot destroy it—for it is immortal; use cannot stale it, pain can only sanctify it. It will be to him as a beacon-light to the sea-worn mariner that tells of home and peace upon the shore, as a rainbow-promise set upon his sky. It alone of all things pertaining to him will defy the attacks of the consuming years, and when, old and withered, he lays him down to die, it will at last present itself before his glazing eyes, an embodied joy, clad in shining robes, and breathing the airs of Paradise!

For such is love to those to whom it has been given to see him face to face.

CHAPTER V.

AND RECEIVES AN INVITATION.

ARTHUR did not do much fishing that morning; indeed, he never so much as got his line into the water—he simply sat there lost in dreams, and in a vague way hoping that Angela would come back again. But she did not come back, though it would be difficult to say what prevented her; for, had he but known it, she was sitting within a hundred yards of him for the space of a full hour, and occasionally peeping out to watch his mode of fishing with some curiosity. It was, she reflected, exceedingly unlike that practised by Jakes. She, too, was wishing that he would detect her, and come to talk to her; but, among other new sensations, Angela was now the victim of a most unaccountable shyness, and could not make up her mind to reveal her whereabouts.

At last Arthur awoke from his long reverie, and remembered with a sudden pang that he had had nothing to eat since the previous evening, and that he was consequently exceedingly hungry. On consulting his watch, he also discovered that it was twelve o'clock, and, moreover, that he was quite stiff from sitting so long in the same position. So, sighing to think that such a vulgar necessity as this of obtaining food should force him to depart, he put up his unused fishing-rod and started for Isleworth, where he arrived just as the bell was ringing for lunch.

George received him with cold civility, and asked him what sport he had, to which he was forced to reply—none.

"Did you see anybody there?"

"Yes, I met Miss Caresfoot."

"Ah! trust a girl to trail out a man. What is she like? I remember her a raw-boned girl of fourteen with fine eyes."

"I think that she is the handsomest woman I ever saw," Arthur replied, coldly.

"Ah!" said George, with a rude little laugh, "youth is always enthusiastic, especially when the object is of the dairymaid cut."

There was something so intensely insolent in his host's way of talking that Arthur longed to throw a dish at him, but he restrained his feelings, and dropped the subject.

"Let me see, you are only just home from India, are you?" asked George, presently.

"I returned at the beginning of last month."

"And what were you doing there?"

"Travelling about and shooting."

"Did you get much sport?"

"No, I was rather unfortunate, but I and another fellow killed two tigers, and went after a rogue elephant; but he nearly killed us. I got some very good ibex-shooting in Cashmere, however."

"What do you intend to do with yourself now? Your education has been extravagantly expensive, especially the Cambridge part of it. Are you going to turn it to any account?"

"Yes. I am going to travel for another year, and then read for the Bar. There is no particular object in being called too young, and I wish to see something more of the world first."

"Ah! I see, idleness called by a fine name."

"Really I cannot agree with you," said Arthur, who was rapidly losing his temper.

"Of course you can't, but every man has a right to choose his own road to the dogs. Come," he added, with a smile of malice, as he noticed Arthur's rising colour, "no need to get angry; you see I stand *in loco parentis,* and feel bound to express my opinion."

"I must congratulate you on the success with which you assume the character," answered Arthur, now thoroughly put-out; "but, as everything I have done or mean to do is so distasteful to you, I think it is a pity that you did not give me the benefit of your advice a little sooner."

George's only answer was a laugh, and presently the two parted, detesting each other more cordially than ever.

At half-past three, when George was still away, for he had gone out with his bailiff immediately after lunch, Philip and his daughter were shown into the drawing-room, where we may be sure Arthur was awaiting them.

"Mr. Caresfoot is not back yet," said Arthur, "but I do not suppose that he will be long."

"Oh! he will be here soon," said Philip, "because I told him we were coming to call. What sort of sport did you have? What, none! I am very sorry. You must come and try again—ah! I forgot you are going away. By the way, Mr. Heigham, why should you go just yet? If you are fond of fishing, and have nothing better to do, come and put up at the Abbey House for a while; we are plain people, but there is plenty of room, and you shall have a hearty welcome. Would you care to come?"

It would have been amusing to any outsider to watch Angela's face as she heard this astounding proposition, for nobody had been invited inside her father's doors within her recollection. It assumed first of all a look of

blank amazement, which was presently changed into one of absolute horror.

"Would he come, indeed?" reflected Arthur. "Would he step into Paradise? would he accept the humble offer of free quarters in the Garden of Eden?" Rapture beamed so visibly from every feature of his face that Philip saw it and smiled. Just as he was about to accept with enthusiasm, he caught sight of Angela's look of distress. It chilled him like the sudden shock of cold water; she did not wish him to come, he thought, she did not care for him. Obliged, however, to give an answer, he said—

"I shall be delighted if"—and here he bowed towards her—"Miss Caresfoot does not object."

"If, father," broke in Angela, with hesitation, "you could arrange that Mr. Heigham came to-morrow, not to-day, it would be more convenient. I must get a room ready."

"Ah! domestic details; I had overlooked them. I daresay you can manage that—eh, Heigham?"

"Oh! yes, easily, thank you."

As he said the words, the door was flung open, and "Lady Bellamy" was announced with the energy that a footman always devotes to the enunciation of a title, and next second a splendid creature, magnificently dressed, sailed into the room.

"Ah! how do you do, Mr. Caresfoot?" she said, in that low, rich voice that he remembered so well. "It is some time since we met; indeed, it quite brings back old times to see you, when we were all young people together."

"At any rate, Lady Bellamy, you show no signs of age; indeed, if you will permit me to say so, you look more beautiful than ever."

"Ah! Mr. Caresfoot, you have not forgotten how to be gallant, but let me tell you that it entirely depends upon what light I am in. If you saw me in the midst of one of those new-fangled electric illuminations, you would see that I do look old; but what can one expect at forty?" Here her glance fell upon Angela's face for the first time, and she absolutely started; the great pupils of her eyes expanded, and a dark frown spread itself for a moment over her countenance. Next second it was gone. "Is it possible that that beautiful girl is your daughter? But, remembering her mother, I need not ask. Look at her, Mr. Caresfoot, and then look at me, and say whether or not I look old. And who is the young man? Her lover, I suppose—at any rate, he looks like it; but please introduce me."

"Angela," said Philip, crossing to the window where they were talking, "let me introduce you to Lady Bellamy. Mr. Heigham—Lady Bellamy."

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Caresfoot, though I think it is very generous of me to say so."

Angela looked puzzled.

"Indeed!" she said.

"What! do you not guess why it is generous? Then look at yourself in the glass, and you will see. I used to have some pretension to good looks, but I could never have stood beside you at the best of times, and now—— Your mother, even when I was at my best, always *killed* me if I was in the same room with her, and you are even handsomer than your mother."

Angela blushed very much at this unqualified praise, and, putting it and the exclamation her appearance had that morning wrung from Arthur together, she suddenly

came to the conclusion that she must be very good-looking—for, odd as it may seem, she had never before taken the matter into serious consideration—a conclusion that made her feel extremely happy, she could not quite tell why.

It was whilst she was thus blushing and looking her happiest and loveliest that George, returning from his walk, chanced to glance in at the window and see her, and, gradually drawn by the attraction of her beauty, his eyes fixed themselves intently upon her, and his coarse features grew instinct with a mixture of hungry wickedness and delighted astonishment. It was thus that Arthur and Lady Bellamy saw him. Philip, who was looking at a picture in the corner of the room, did not see him; nor, indeed, did Angela. The look was unmistakable, and once more the dark frown settled upon Lady Bellamy's brow, and the expanding pupils filled the heavy-lidded eyes. As for Arthur, it made him feel sick with an unreasonable alarm.

Next minute George entered the room with a stupid smile upon his face, and looking as dazed as a bat that has suddenly been shown the sun. Angela's heaven-lit beauty had come upon his gross mind as a revelation; it fascinated him, he had lost his command over himself.

"Oh! here you are at last, George," said Lady Bellamy—it was always her habit to call him George. "We have all been like sheep without a shepherd, though I saw you keeping an eye on the flock through the window."

George started. He did not know that he had been observed.

"I did not know that you were all here, or I would have been back sooner," he said, and then began to shake hands.

When he came to Angela, he favoured her with a tender pressure of the fingers and an elaborate and high-flown speech of welcome, both of which were inexpressibly disagreeable to her. But here Lady Bellamy intervened, and skilfully forced him into a conversation with her, in which Philip joined.

"What does Lady Bellamy remind you of?" Angela asked Arthur, as soon as the hum of talk made it improbable that they would be overheard.

"Of an Egyptian sorceress, I think. Look at the low, broad forehead, the curling hair, the full lips, and the inscrutable look of the face."

"To my mind she is an ideal of the Spirit of Power. I am very much afraid of her, and, as for him"—nodding towards George—"I dislike him even more than I was prepared to," and she gave a little shudder. "By the way, Mr. Heigham, you really must not be so rash as to accept my father's invitation."

"If you do not wish to see me, of course I will not," he answered, in a hurt and disappointed tone.

"Oh! it is not that, indeed; how could you think so, when only this morning we agreed to be friends?"

"Well, what is it then?" he asked, blankly.

"Why, Mr. Heigham, the fact is that we—that is, my old nurse and I, for my father is irregular in his meals, and always takes them by himself—live so very plainly, and I am ashamed to ask you to share our mode of life. For instance, we have nothing but bread and milk for breakfast;" and the golden head sunk in some confusion before his amused gaze.

"Oh! is that all?" he said, cheerily. "I am very fond of bread and milk."

"And then," went on Angela with her confession, "we never drink wine, and I know that gentlemen do."

"I am a teetotaler, so that does not matter."

"Really?"

"Yes—really."

"But then, you know, my father shuts himself up all day, so that you will have nobody but myself to talk to."

"Oh! never mind"—encouragingly. "I am sure that we shall get on."

"Well, if, in spite of all this and a great deal more—oh! a very great deal that I have not time to tell you—you still care to come, I will do my best to amuse you. At any rate, we can read together; that will be something, if you don't find me too stupid. You must remember that I have only had a private education, and have never been to college like you. I shall be glad of the opportunity of rubbing up my classics a little; I have been neglecting them rather lately, and actually got into a mess yesterday over a passage in Aristophanes that I shall ask you to clear up."

This was enough for Arthur, whose knowledge of the classics was that of the ordinary University graduate; he turned the subject with remarkable promptitude.

"Tell me," he said, looking her straight in the face, "are you glad that I am coming?"

The grey eyes dropped a little before the boldness of his gaze, but she answered, unhesitatingly—

"Yes, for my own sake I am glad; but I fear that you will find it very dull."

"Come, Angela, we must be off; I want to be home by a quarter to six," said Philip just then.

She at once rose and shook hands with Arthur, mur-

muring, "Good-bye till to-morrow morning," and then with Lady Bellamy.

George, meanwhile, with the most unwonted hospitality, was pressing her father to stay to dinner, and, when he declined, announcing his intention of coming over to see him on the morrow. At last he got away, but not before Lady Bellamy had bid him a seemingly cordial adieu.

"You and your charming daughter must come and see me at Rewtham House, when we get in. What, have you not heard that Sir John has bought it from poor Maria Lee's executors?"

Philip turned pale as death, and hurried from the room.

"It is good," reflected Lady Bellamy, as she watched the effect of her shaft, "to let him know that I never forget."

But, even when her father had gone, the path was still blocked to Angela.

"What!" said George, who was, when in an amiable mood, that worst of all cads, a jocose cad, "are you going to play truant, too, my pretty cousin? Then first you must pay the penalty, not a very heavy one, however." And he threw his long arm round her waist, and prepared to give her a cousinly embrace.

At first Angela, who was not accustomed to little jokes of the sort, did not understand what his intentions were, but as soon as she did, being an extremely powerful young woman, she soon put a stop to them, shaking George away from her so sharply by a single swing of her lithe body, that, stumbling over a footstool in his rapid backward passage, in a trice he measured his length upon the floor. Seeing what she had done, Angela turned and fled after her father.

As for Arthur, the scene was too much for his risible nerves, and he fairly roared with laughter, whilst even Lady Bellamy went as near to it as she ever did.

George rose, white with wrath.

"Mr. Heigham," he said, "I see nothing to laugh at in an accident."

"Don't you?" replied Arthur. "I do; it is just the most ludicrous accident that I ever saw."

George turned away muttering something that it was perhaps as well his guest did not hear, and at once began to attack Lady Bellamy.

"My dear George," was her rejoinder, "let this little adventure teach you that it is not wise for middle-aged men to indulge in gallantries towards young ladies, and especially young ladies of thews and sinews. Good-night."

At the same moment the footman announced that the dog-cart which Arthur had ordered was waiting for him.

"Good-bye, Mr. Heigham, good-bye," said George, with angry sarcasm. "Within twenty-four hours you have killed my favourite dog, taken offence at my well-meant advice, and ridiculed my misfortune. If we should ever meet again, doubtless you will have further surprises in store for me;" and, without giving Arthur time to make any reply, he left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

GEORGE SHOWS THE WHIP.

EARLY on the day following Arthur's departure from Isleworth, Lady Bellamy received a note from George, requesting her, if convenient, to come and see him that morning, as he had something rather important to talk to her about.

"John," she said to her husband at breakfast, "do you want the brougham this morning?"

"No. Why?"

"Because I am going over to Isleworth."

"Hadn't you better take the luggage-cart too, and your luggage in it, and go and live there altogether? It would save trouble, sending backwards and forwards," suggested her husband, with severe sarcasm.

Lady Bellamy cut the top off an egg with a single clean stroke—all her movements were decisive—before she answered.

"I thought," she said, "that we had done with that sort of nonsense some years ago; are you going to begin it again?"

"Yes, Lady Bellamy, I am. I am not going to stand being bullied and jeered at by that damned scoundrel Caresfoot any more. I am not going to stand your eternal visits to him."

"You have stood them for twenty years; rather late in the day to object now, isn't it?" she remarked, coolly, beginning her egg.

"It is never too late to mend; it is not too late for you to stop quietly at home and do your duty by your husband."

"Most men would think that I had done my duty by him pretty well. Twenty years ago you were nobody, and had, comparatively speaking, nothing. Now you have a title and between three and four thousand a year. Who have you to thank for that? Certainly not yourself."

"Curse the title and the money! I had rather be a poor devil of an attorney with a large family, and five hundred a year to keep them on, than live the life I do between you and that vulgar beast Caresfoot. It's a

dog's life, not a man's;" and poor Bellamy was so overcome at his real or imaginary wrongs that the tears actually rolled down his puffy little face.

His wife surveyed him with some amusement.

"I think," she said, "that you are a miserable creature."

"Perhaps I am, Anne; but I tell you what it is, even a miserable creature can be driven too far. It may perhaps prove worth your while to be a little careful."

She cast one swift look at him, a look not without apprehension in it, for there was a ring about his voice that she did not like, but his appearance was so ludicrously wretched that it reassured her. She finished her egg, and then, slowly driving the spoon through the shell, she said—

"Don't threaten, John; it is a bad habit, and shows an un-Christian state of mind; besides, it might force me to cr-r-rush you, in self-defence, you know;" and, John and the egg-shell having finally collapsed together, Lady Bellamy ordered the brougham.

Having thus sufficiently scourged her husband, she departed in due course to visit her own taskmaster, little guessing what awaited her at his hands. After all, there is a deal of poetic justice in the world. Little Smith, fresh from his mother's apron-strings, is savagely beaten by the cock of the school, Jones, and to him Jones is an all-powerful, cruel devil, placed above all possibility of retribution. If, however, little Smith could see the omnipotent Jones being mentally ploughed and harrowed by his papa the clergyman, in celebration of the double event of his having missed a scholarship and taken too much sherry, it is probable that his wounded feelings would be greatly soothed. Nor does it stop there. Robinson, the squire of the parish, takes it out of the Reverend Jones,

and speaks ill of him to the bishop, a Low Churchman, on the matter of vestments, and very shortly afterwards Sir Buster Brown, the Chairman of Quarter Sessions, expresses his opinion pretty freely of Robinson in his magisterial capacity, only in his turn to receive a most unexampled wigging from Her Majesty's judge, Baron Muddlebone, for not showing him that respect he was accustomed to receive from the High Sheriff of the county. And even over the august person of the judge himself there hangs the fear of the only thing that he cannot commit for contempt, public opinion. Justice! why, the world is full of it, only it is mostly built upon a foundation of wrong.

Lady Bellamy found George sitting in the dining-room beside the safe that had so greatly interested her husband. It was open, and he was reading a selection from the bundle of letters which the reader may remember having seen in his hands before.

"How do, Anne?" he said, without rising. "You look very handsome this morning. I never saw a woman wear better."

She vouchsafed no reply to his greeting, but turned as pale as death.

"What!" she said, huskily, pointing with her finger to the letters in his hand, "what are you doing with those letters?"

"Bravo, Anne; quite tragic. What a Lady Macbeth you would make! Come quote, 'All the perfumes of Araby will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!' Go on."

"What are you doing with those letters?"

"Have you never broken a dog by showing him the whip, Anne? I have got something to ask of you, and I

wish to get you into a generous frame of mind first. Listen now! I am going to read you a few extracts from a past that is so vividly recorded here."

She sank into a chair, hid her face in her hands, and groaned. George, whose own features betrayed a certain nervousness, took a yellow sheet of paper, and began to read.

"'Do you know how old I am to-day? Nineteen, and I have been married a year and a half. Ah! what a happy lass I was before I married; how they worshipped me in my old home! "Queen Anne," they always called me. Well, they are dead now, and pray God they sleep so sound that they can neither hear nor see. Yes, a year and a half—a year of happiness, half a year of hell; happiness whilst I did not know you, hell since I saw your face. What secret spring of wickedness did you touch in my heart? I never had a thought of wrong before you came. But when I first set eyes upon your face, I felt some change come over me: I recognised my evil destiny. How you discovered my fascination, how you led me on to evil, you best know. I am no coward, I do not wish to excuse myself, but sometimes I think that you have much to answer for, George. Hark, I hear my baby crying, my beautiful boy with his father's eyes. Do you know, I believe that the child has grown afraid of me: it beats at me with its tiny hands. I think that my very dog dislikes me now. They know me as I am; Nature tells them; everybody knows me except ——. He will come in presently from visiting his sick and poor, and kiss me and call me his sweet wife, and I shall act the living lie. Oh! God, I cannot bear it much longer——'

"There is plenty of the same sort," remarked George, coolly. "It affords a most interesting study of mental

anatomy, but I have no time to read more of it. We will pass on to another."

Lady Bellamy did not move; she sat trembling a little, her face buried in her hands.

He took up a second letter, and began to read a marked passage.

"'The die is cast, I will come; I can no longer resist your influence; it grows stronger every day, and now it makes me a murderess, for the shock will kill him. And yet I am tired of the sameness and smallness of my life; my mind is too big to be cramped in such narrow fetters.'

"That extract is really very funny," said George, critically. "But don't look depressed, Anne, I am only going to trouble you with one more dated a year or so later. Listen!

"'I have several times seen the man you sent me; he is a fool and contemptible in appearance, and, worst of all, shows signs of falling in love with me; but, if you wish it, I will go through the marriage ceremony with him, poor little dupe! You will not marry me yourself, and I would do more than that to keep near you; indeed, I have no choice, I *must* keep near you. I went to the Zoological Gardens the other day and saw a rattlesnake fed upon a live rabbit; the poor thing had ample room to run away in, but could not, it was fascinated, and sat still and screamed. At last the snake struck it, and I thought that its eyes looked like yours. I am as helpless as that poor animal, and you are much more cruel than the snake. And yet my mind is infinitely stronger than your own in every way. I cannot understand it. What is the source of your power over me? But I am quite reckless now, so what does it matter? I will do anything that does not put me within reach of the law.

You know that my husband is dead. I *knew* that he would die; he expired with my name upon his lips. The child, too, I hear, died in a fit of croup; the nurse had gone out, and there was no one to look after it. Upon my word, I may well be reckless, for there is no forgiveness for such as you and I. As for little B——, as I think I told you, I will lead him on and marry him: at any rate, I will make his fortune for him: I *must* devote myself to something, and ambition is more absorbing than anything else—at least, I shall rise to something great. Good-night; I don't know which aches the most, my head or my heart.'

"Now that extract would be interesting reading to Bellamy, would it not?"

Here she suddenly sprang forward and snatched at the letter. But George was too quick for her; he flung it into the safe by his side, and swung the heavy lid to.

"No, no, my dear Anne, that property is too valuable to be parted with except for a consideration."

Her attempt frustrated, she dropped back into her chair.

"What are you torturing me for?" she asked, hoarsely. "Have you any object in dragging up the ghost of that dead past, or is it merely for amusement?"

"Did I not tell you that I had a favour to ask of you, and wished to get you into a proper frame of mind first?"

"A favour. You mean that you have some wickedness in hand that you are too great a coward to execute yourself. Out with it; I know you too well to be shocked."

"Oh, very well. You saw Angela Caresfoot, Philip's daughter, here yesterday?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"Very good. I mean to marry her, and you must manage it for me."

Lady Bellamy sat quite still, and made no answer.

"You will now understand why I read you those extracts," continued George, relieved to find that he had not provoked the outburst which he expected. "I am thoroughly determined upon marrying that girl at whatever cost, and I see very clearly that I shall not be able to do so without your help. With your help the matter will be easy; for no obstacle, except the death of the girl herself, can prevail against your iron determination and unbounded fertility of resource."

"And if I refuse?"

"I must have read those extracts to very little purpose for you to talk about refusing. If you refuse, the pangs of conscience will overcome me, and I shall feel obliged to place these letters, and more especially those referring to himself, in the hands of your husband. Of course it will, for my own sake, be unpleasant to me to have to do so, but I can easily travel for a year or two till the talk has blown over. For you it will be different. Bellamy has no cause to love you now; judge what he will feel when he knows all the truth. He will scarcely keep the story to himself, and, even were he to do so, it could easily be set about in other ways, and, in either case, you will be a ruined woman, and all that you have toiled and schemed for during twenty years will be snatched from you in an instant. If, on the other hand, you do not refuse, and I cannot believe that you will, on my wedding-day I will burn these uncomfortable records before your eyes, or, if you prefer it, you shall burn them yourself."

"You have only seen this girl once; is it possible that you are in earnest in wishing to marry her?"

"Do you think that I should go through this scene by way of a joke? I never was so much in earnest in my life before. I am in love with her, I tell you, as much in love as though I had known her for years. What happened to you with reference to me has happened to me with reference to her, or something very like it, and marry her I must and will."

Lady Bellamy, as she heard these words, rose from her chair and flung herself on the ground before him, clasping his knees with her hands.

"Oh, George, George!" she cried, in a broken voice, "have some little pity; do not force me to do this unnatural thing. Is your heart a stone, or are you altogether a devil, that by such cruel threats you can drive me into becoming the instrument of my own shame? I know what I am, none better: but for whose sake did I become so? Surely, George, I have some claim on your compassion, if I have none on your love. Think again, George; and, if you will not give her up, choose some other means to compass this poor girl's ruin."

"Get up, Anne, and don't talk sentimental rubbish. Not but what," he added, with a sneer, "it is rather amusing to hear you pitying your successful rival."

She sprang to her feet, all the softness and entreaty gone from her face, which was instead now spread with her darkest and most vindictive look.

"*I* pity her!" she said. "I hate her. Look you, if I have to do this, my only consolation will be in knowing that what I do will drag my successor down below my own level. I suffer; she shall suffer more; I know you a fiend, she shall find a whole hell with you; she is

purer and better than I have ever been; soon you shall make her worse than I have dreamt of being. Her purity shall be dishonoured, her love betrayed, her life reduced to such chaos that she shall cease to believe even in her God, and in return for these things I will give her—*you*. Your new plaything shall pass through my mill, George Caresfoot, before ever she comes to yours; and on her I will repay with interest all that I have suffered at your hands;" and, exhausted with the fierceness of her own invective and the violence of conflicting passions, she sank back into her chair.

"Bravo, Anne! quite in your old style. I daresay that the young lady will require a little moulding, and she could not be in better hands; but mind, no tricks—I am not going to be cheated out of my bride."

"You need not fear, George; I shall not murder her. I do not believe in violence; it is the last resource of fools. If I did, you would not be alive now."

George laughed a little uneasily.

"Well, we are good friends again, so there is no need to talk of such things," he said. "The siege will not be by any means an easy one—there are many obstacles in the way, and I don't think that my intended has taken a particular fancy to me. You will have to work for your letters, Anne; but first of all take a day or two to think it over, and make a plan of the campaign. And now good-bye; I have got a bad headache, and am going to lie down."

She rose, and went without another word; but all necessity for setting about her shameful task was soon postponed by news which reached her the next morning, to the effect that George Caresfoot was seriously ill.

CHAPTER VII.

ARTHUR DREAMS.

THE dog-cart that Arthur had hired to take him away belonged to an old-fashioned inn in the parish of Rewtham, situated about a mile from Rewtham House (which had just passed into the hands of the Bellamys), and two from Bratham Abbey. Thither Arthur had himself driven. His Jehu, known through all the country round as "Old Sam," was an ancient ostler, who had been in the service of the Rewtham "King's Head," man and boy, for over sixty years, and from him Arthur collected a good deal of inaccurate information about the Caresfoot family, including a garbled version of the death of Angela's mother and Philip's disinheritance.

After all, there are few more comfortable places than an inn; not a huge London hotel, where you are known as No. 48, and have to lock the door of your cell when you come out of it, and deliver up your key to the warder in the hall; but an old-fashioned country establishment where they cook your beefsteak exactly as you like it, and give you sound ale and a four-poster. At least, so thought Arthur, as he sat in the private parlour smoking his pipe and reflecting on the curious vicissitudes of life. Now, here he was, with all his hopes and interests utterly changed in a single space of six-and-twenty hours. Why, six-and-twenty hours ago, he had never met his respected guardian, nor Sir John and Lady Bellamy, nor Philip and his daughter. He could hardly believe that it was only that morning that he had first seen Angela. It seemed weeks ago, and, if time could have been measured on a new principle, by events and

not by minutes, it would have been weeks. The wheel of existence, he thought, revolves with a strange irregularity. For months and years it turns slowly and steadily under the even pressure of monotonous events. But, on some unexpected day, a tide rushes down the stream of life, and spins it round at speed; then tears onward to that ocean called the Past, leaving its plaything to creak and turn, to turn and creak; or wrecked perhaps and useless.

Thinking thus, Arthur made his way to bed. The excitement of the day had wearied him, and for a while he slept soundly, but, as the fatigue of body wore off, the activity of his mind asserted itself, and he began to dream vague, happy dreams of Angela, that by degrees took shape and form, till they stood out clearly before the vision of his mind. He dreamt that he and Angela were journeying through the green fields in summer, two happy travellers, till by-and-by they came to the dark entrance of a wood, into which they plunged, fearing nothing. Thicker grew the overshadowing branches, and darker grew the path, and now they journeyed, lover-wise, with their arms around each other. But, as they passed along, they came to a place where the paths forked, und here he stooped to kiss her. Already he could feel the thrill of her embrace, when she was swept from him by an unseen force, and carried down the path before them, leaving him rooted where he was. But still he could trace her progress as she went, wringing her hands in sorrow; and presently he saw the form of Lady Bellamy, robed as an Egyptian sorceress, and holding a letter in her hand, which she offered to Angela, whispering in her ear. She took it, and then in a second the letter became a great snake, with George's head,

that threw its coils around her and struck at her with its fangs. Next, the darkness of night rushed down upon the scene, and out of the darkness came wild cries and mocking laughter, and the choking sounds of death. And his senses left him.

When sight and sense came back, he dreamt that he was still walking down a wooded lane, but the foliage of the overhanging trees was of a richer green. The air was sweet with the scent of unknown flowers, beautiful birds flitted around him, and from far-off floated the murmur of the sea. And as he travelled, broken-hearted, a fair woman with a gentle voice stood by his side, and kissed and comforted him, till at length he grew weary of her kisses, and she left him, weeping, and he went on his way alone, seeking his lost Angela. Then at length the path took a sudden turn, and he stood on the shore of an illimitable ocean, over which brooded a strange light, as where

> "The quiet end of evening smiles
> Miles on miles."

And there, with the soft light lingering on her hair, and tears of gladness in her eyes, stood Angela, more lovely than before, her arms outstretched to greet him. And the night closed in, and he awoke.

His eyes opened upon the solemn and beautiful hour of the quickening of the dawn, and the thrill and softness that comes from contact with the things we meet in sleep was still upon him. He got up and flung open his lattice window. From the garden beneath rose the sweet scent of May flowers, very different from that of his dream which yet lingered in his nostrils, while from a neighbouring lilac-bush streamed the rich melody of

the nightingale. Presently it ceased before the broadening daylight, but in its stead, pure and clear and cold, arose the notes of the mavis, giving tuneful thanks and glory to its Maker. And, as he listened, a great calm stole upon his spirit, and kneeling down there by the open window, with the breath of spring upon his brow, and the voice of the happy birds within his ears, Arthur prayed to the Almighty with all his heart, that it might please Him in His wise mercy to verify his dream, inasmuch as he would be well content to suffer, if by suffering he might at last attain to such a joy. And rising from his knees, feeling better and stronger, he knew in some dim way that that undertaking must be blest which, in such a solemn hour of the heart, he did not fear to pray God to guide, to guard, and to consummate.

And on many an after-day, and in many another place, the book of his life would reopen at this well-conned page, and he would see the dim light in the faint, flushed sky, and hear the song of the thrush swelling upwards strong and sweet, and remember his prayer and the peace that fell upon his soul.

By ten o'clock that morning, Arthur, his dog, and his portmanteau, had all arrived together in front of the Abbey House. Before his feet had touched the moss-grown gravel, the hall-door was flung open, and Angela appeared to welcome him, looking, as old Sam the ostler forcibly put it afterwards to his helper, "just like a hangel with the wings hoff." Jakes, too, emerged from the recesses of the garden, and asked Angela, in a tone of aggrieved sarcasm, as he edged his way suspiciously past Aleck, why the gentleman had not brought the "rampingest lion from the Zoologic Gardens" with him at once? Having thus expressed his feelings on the

subject of bulldogs, Jakes shouldered the portmanteau, and made his way with it upstairs. Arthur followed him up the wide oak stairs, every one of which was squared out of a single log, stopping for a while on the landing, where the staircase turned, to gaze at the stern-faced picture which hung so that it looked through the large window facing it, right across the park and over the whole stretch of the Abbey lands, and to wonder at the deep-graved inscription of "Devil Caresfoot" set so conspicuously beneath.

His room was the largest upon the first landing, and the same in which Angela's mother had died. It had never been used from that hour to this, and, indeed, in a little recess or open space between a cupboard and the wall, there still stood two trestles, draped with rotten black cloth, that had originally been brought there to rest Hilda's coffin on. Angela had overlooked them in getting the room ready.

This spacious but somewhat gloomy apartment was hung round with portraits of the Caresfoots of past ages, many of which bore a marked resemblance to Philip, but amongst them he looked in vain for one in the slightest degree like Angela, whose handiwork he recognised in two large bowls of flowers placed upon the dark oak dressing-table.

Just as Jakes had finished unbuckling his portmanteau, a task that he had undertaken with some groaning, and was departing in haste, fearing lest he should be asked to do something else, Arthur caught sight of the trestles.

"What are those?" he asked, cheerfully.

"Coffin-stools," was the abrupt reply.

"Coffin-stools!" ejaculated Arthur, feeling that it was

unpleasant to have little details connected with one's latter end brought thus abruptly into notice. "What the deuce are they doing here?"

"Brought to put the last as slept in that 'ere bed on, and stood ever since."

"Don't you think," insinuated Arthur, gently, "that you had better take them away?"

"Can't do so; they be part of the furniture, they be —stand there all handy for the next one, too, maybe you;" and he vanished with a sardonic grin.

Jakes did not submit to the indignities of unbuckling portmanteaus and having his legs sniffed at by bulldogs for nothing. Not by any means pleased by suggestions so unpleasant, Arthur took his way downstairs, determined to renew the coffin-stool question with his host. He found Angela waiting for him in the hall, and making friends with Aleck.

"Will you come in and see my father for a minute before we go out?" she said.

Arthur assented, and she led the way into the study, where Philip always sat, the same room in which his father had died. He was sitting at a writing-table as usual, at work on farm accounts. Rising, he greeted Arthur civilly, taking, however, no notice of his daughter, although he had not seen her since the previous day.

"Well, Heigham, so you have made up your mind to brave these barbarous wilds, have you? I am delighted to see you, but I must warn you that, beyond a pipe and a glass of grog in the evening, I have not much time to put at your disposal. We are rather a curious household. I don't know whether Angela has told you, but for one thing we do not take our meals together, so you will have to make your choice between the dining-

room and the nursery, for my daughter is not out of the nursery yet;" and he gave a little laugh. "On the whole, perhaps you had better be relegated to the nursery; it will, at any rate, be more amusing to you than the society of a morose old fellow like myself. And, besides, I am very irregular in my habits. Angela, you are staring at me again; I should be so very much obliged if you would look the other way. I only hope, Heigham, that old Pigott won't talk your head off; she has got a dreadful tongue. Well, don't let me keep you any longer; it is a lovely day for the time of year. Try to amuse yourself somehow, and I hope for your sake that Angela will not occupy herself with you as she does with me, by staring as though she wished to examine your brains and backbone. Good-bye for the present."

"What does he mean about your staring at him?" asked Arthur, as soon as they were fairly outside the door.

"Mean!" answered poor Angela, who looked as though she were going to cry. "I wish I could tell you; all I know is that he cannot bear me to look at him—he is always complaining of it. That is why we do not take our meals together—at least, I believe it is. He detests my being near him. I am sure I don't know why; it makes me very unhappy. I cannot see anything different in my eyes from anybody else's, can you?" and she turned them, swimming as they were with tears of mortification, full upon Arthur.

He scrutinised their depths very closely, so closely indeed, that presently she dropped them again with a blush.

"Well," she said, "I am sure you have looked long enough. Are they different?"

"Very different," replied the oracle, with enthusiasm.

"How?"

"Well, they—they are larger."

"Is that all?"

"And they are deeper."

"Deeper—that is nothing. I want to know if they produce any unpleasant effect upon you—different from other people's eyes, I mean?"

"Well, if you ask me, I am afraid that your eyes do produce a strange effect upon me, but I cannot say that it is an unpleasant one. But you did not look long enough for me to form a really sound opinion. Let us try again."

"No, I will not; and I believe that you are laughing at me. I think that is very unkind;" and she marched on in silence.

"Don't be angry with me, or I shall be miserable. I really was not laughing at you; only, if you knew what wonderful eyes you have got, you would not ask ridiculous questions about them. Your father must be a strange man to get such ideas. I am sure I should be delighted if you would look at me all day long. But tell me something more about your father; he interests me very much."

Angela felt the tell-tale blood rise to her face as he praised her eyes, and bit her lips with vexation; it seemed to her that she had suddenly caught an epidemic of blushing.

"I cannot tell you very much about my father, because I do not know much; his life, to a great extent, is a sealed book to me. But they say that once he was a very different man, when he was quite young, I mean. But all of a sudden his father died—my grandfather, you know—whose picture is on the stairs, and within a day

or two my mother died too; that was when I was born. After that my father broke down, and became what he is. For twenty years he has lived as he does now, poring all day over books of accounts, and very rarely seeing anybody, for he does all his business by letter, or nearly all of it, and he has no friends. There was some story about his being engaged to a lady who lived at Rewtham when he married my mother, which I daresay you have heard; but I don't know much about it. But, Mr. Heigham"—and here she dropped her voice—"there is one thing that I must warn you of; my father has strange fancies at times. He is dreadfully superstitious, and thinks that he has communications with beings from another world. I believe that it is all nonsense, but I tell you so that you may not be surprised at anything he says or does. He is not a happy man, Mr. Heigham."

"Apparently not. I cannot imagine any one being happy who is superstitious; it is the most dreadful bondage in the world," he answered.

"Where are your ravens to-day?" asked Arthur, presently.

"I don't know; I have not seen very much of them for the last week or two. They have made a nest in one of the big trees at the back of the house, and I daresay that they are there, or perhaps they are hunting for their food—they always feed themselves. But I will soon tell you," and she whistled a soft but penetrating note.

Next minute there was a swoop of wings, and the largest raven, after hovering over her for a minute, lit upon her shoulder, and rubbed his black head against her face.

"This is Jack, you see; I expect that Jill is busy sit-

ting on her eggs. Fly away, Jack, and look after your wife." She clapped her hands, and the great bird, giving a reproachful croak, spread his wings, and was gone.

"You have a strange power over animals to make those birds so fond of you."

"Do you think so? It is only because, living as I do quite alone, I have had time to study all their ways, and make friends of them. Do you see that thrush there? I know him well; I fed him during the frost last winter. If you will stand back with the dog, you shall see."

Arthur hid himself behind a thick bush, and watched. Angela whistled again, but in another note, with a curious result. Not only the thrush in question, but quite a dozen other birds of different sorts and sizes, came flying round her, some settling at her feet, and one, a little robin, actually perching itself upon her hat. Presently she dismissed them as she had done the raven, by clapping her hands, and came back to Arthur.

"In the winter time," she said, "I could show you more curious things than that."

"I think that you are a witch," said Arthur, who was astounded at the sight.

She laughed as she answered—

"The only witchery that I use is kindness."

CHAPTER VIII.

SHADOWS.

PIGOTT, Angela's old nurse, was by no means sorry to hear of Arthur's visit to the Abbey House, though, having in her youth been a servant in good places, she was distressed at the nature of his reception. But, putting this aside, she thought it high time that her darling

should see a young man or two, that she might "learn what the world was like." Pigott was no believer in female celibacy, and Angela's future was a frequent subject of meditation with her, for she knew very well that her present mode of life was scarcely suited either to her birth, her beauty, or her capabilities. Not that she ever, in her highest flights, imagined Angela as a great lady, or one of society's shining stars; she loved to picture her in some quiet, happy home, beloved by her husband, and surrounded by children as beautiful as herself. It was but a moderate ambition for one so peerlessly endowed, but she would have been glad to see it fulfilled. For of late years there had sprung up in nurse Pigott's mind an increasing dislike of her surroundings, which sometimes almost amounted to a feeling of horror. Philip she had always detested, with his preoccupied air and uncanny ways.

"There must," she would say "be something wicked about a man as is afraid to have his own bonny daughter look him in the face, to say nothing of his being that mean as to grudge her the clothes on her back, and make her live worse nor a servant-girl."

Having, therefore, by a quiet peep through the curtains, ascertained that he was nice-looking, and about the right age, Pigott confessed to herself that she was heartily glad of Arthur's arrival, and determined, should she take to him on further acquaintance, that he should find a warm ally in her in any advances he might choose to make on the fortress of Angela's affections.

"I do so hope that you don't mind dining at half-past twelve, and with my old nurse," Angela said, as they went together up the stairs to the room they used as a dining-room.

"Of course I don't—I like it, really I do."

Angela shook her head, and, looking but partially convinced, led the way down the passage, and into the room, where, to her astonishment, she perceived that the dinner-table was furnished with a more sumptuous meal than she had seen upon it for years, the fact being that Pigott had received orders from Philip, which she did not know of, not to spare expense whilst Arthur was his guest.

"What waste," reflected Angela, in whom the pressure of circumstances had developed an economical turn of mind, as she glanced at the unaccustomed jug of beer. "He said he was a teetotaler."

A loud "hem!" from Pigott, arresting her attention, stopped all further consideration of the matter. That good lady, who, in honour of the occasion, was dressed in a black gown of a formidable character and a many-ribboned cap, was standing up behind her chair waiting to be introduced to the visitor. Angela proceeded to go through the ceremony which Pigott's straight-up-and-down attitude rendered rather trying.

"Nurse, this is the gentleman that my father has asked to stay with us. Mr. Heigham, let me introduce you to my old nurse, Pigott."

Arthur bowed politely, whilst Pigott made two elaborate curtsies, retiring a step backwards after each, as though to make room for another. Her speech, too, carefully prepared for the occasion, is worthy of transcription.

"Hem!" she said, "this, sir, is a pleasure as I little expected, and I well knows that it is not what you or the likes is accustomed to, a-eating of dinners and teas with old women; which I hopes, sir, how as you will put up with it, seeing how as the habits of this house is

what might, without mistake, be called peculiar, which I says without any offence to Miss Angela, 'cause, though her bringing-up has been what I calls odd, she knows it as well as I do, which, indeed, is the only consolation I has to offer, being right sure, as indeed I am, how as any young gentleman as ever breathed would sit in a pool of water to dine along with Miss Angela, let alone an old nurse. I ain't such a fool as I may look; no need for you to go a-blushing of, Miss Angela. And now, sir, if you please, we will sit down, for fear lest the gravy should begin to grease;" and, utterly exhausted by the exuberance of her own verbosity, she plunged into her chair—an example which Arthur, bowing his acknowledgments of her opening address, was not slow to follow.

One of his first acts was, at Pigott's invitation, to help himself to a glass of beer, of which, to speak truth, he drank a good deal.

Angela watched the proceeding with interest.

"What," she asked presently, "is a teetotaler?"

The recollection of his statement on the previous day flashed into his mind. He was, however, equal to the occasion.

"A teetotaler," he replied, with gravity, "is a person who only drinks beer," and Angela, the apparent discrepancy explained, retired satisfied.

That was a very pleasant dinner. What a thing it is to be young and in love! How it gilds the gingerbread of life; what new capacities of enjoyment it opens up in us, and, for the matter of that, of pain also; and oh! what stupendous fools it makes of us in everybody else's eyes except our own, and, if we are lucky, in those of our adored!

The afternoon and evening passed much as the

morning had done. Angela took Arthur round the place, and showed him all the spots connected with her strange and lonely childhood, of which she told him many a curious story. In fact, before the day was over, he knew all the history of her innocent life, and was struck with amazement at the variety and depth of her scholastic acquirements and the extraordinary power of her mind, which, combined with her simplicity and total ignorance of the ways of the world, produced an effect as charming as it was unusual. Needless to say that every hour he knew her he fell more deeply in love with her.

At length, about eight o'clock, just as it was beginning to get dark, she suggested that he should go and sit a while with her father.

"And what are you going to do?" asked Arthur.

"Oh! I am going to read a little, and then go to bed; I always go to bed about nine;" and she held out her hand to say good-night. He took it and said—

"Good-night, then; I wish it were to-morrow."

"Why?"

"Because then I should be saying, 'Good-morning, Angela,' instead of 'Good-night, Angela.' May I call you Angela? We seem to know each other so well, you see."

"Yes, of course," she laughed back; "everybody I know calls me Angela, so why shouldn't you?"

"And will you call me Arthur? Everybody I know calls me Arthur."

Angela hesitated, and Angela blushed, though why she hesitated and why she blushed was perhaps more than she could have exactly said.

"Y-e-s, I suppose so—that is, if you like it. It is a pretty name, Arthur. Good-night, Arthur," and she was gone.

His companion gone, Arthur turned and entered the house. The study-door was open, so he went straight in. Philip, who was sitting and staring in an abstracted way at the empty fireplace with a light behind him, turned quickly round as he heard his footstep.

"Oh! it's you, is it, Heigham? I suppose Angela has gone upstairs; she goes to roost very early. I hope that she has not bored you, and that old Pigott hasn't talked your head off. I told you that we were an odd lot, you know; but, if you find us odder than you bargained for, I should advise you to go away."

"Thank you, I have spent a very happy day."

"Indeed! I am glad to hear it. You must be easily satisfied, have an Arcadian mind, and that sort of thing. Take some whisky, and light your pipe."

Arthur did so, and presently Philip, in that tone of gentlemanly ease which above everything distinguished him from his cousin, led the conversation round to his guest's prospects and affairs, more especially to his money affairs. Arthur answered him frankly enough, but this money talk had not the same charms for him that it had for his host. Indeed, a marked repugnance to everything that had to do with money was one of his characteristics; and, wearied out at length with pecuniary details and endless researches into the mysteries of investment, he took advantage of a pause to attempt to change the subject.

"Well," he said, "I am much obliged to you for your advice, for I am very ignorant myself, and hate anything to do with money. I go back to first principles, and believe that we should all be better without it."

"I always thought," answered Philip, with a semi-contemptuous smile, "that the desire of money, or, amongst

savage races, its equivalent, shells or what not, was *the* first principle of human nature."

"Perhaps it is—I really don't know; but I heartily wish that it could be eliminated off the face of the earth."

"Forgive me," laughed Philip, "but that is the speech of a very young man. Why, eliminate money, and you take away the principal interest of life, and destroy the social fabric of the world. What is power but money, comfort?—money, social consideration?—money, ay, and love, and health, and happiness itself? Money, money, money! Tell me," he went on, rising, and addressing him with a curious earnestness, "what god is there more worthy of our adoration than Plutus, seeing that, if we worship him enough, he alone of the idols we set in high places, will never fail us at need."

"It is a worship that rarely brings lasting happiness with it. In our greed to collect the means of enjoyment, surely we lose the power to enjoy?"

"Pshaw! that is the cant of fools, of those who do not know, of those who cannot feel. But I know and I feel, and I tell you that it is not so. The collection of those means is in itself a pleasure, because it gives a consciousness of power. Don't talk to me of Fate; that sovereign" (throwing a coin on to the table) "is Fate's own seal. You see me, for instance, apparently poor and helpless, a social pariah, one to be avoided, and even insulted. Good; before long these will right all that for me. I shall, by their help, be powerful and courted yet. Ay, believe me, Heigham, money is a living moving force; leave it still, and it accumulates; expend it, and it gratifies every wish; save it, and that is best of all, and you hold in your hand a lever that will lift the world. I tell

you that there is no height to which it cannot bring you, no gulf it will not bridge you."

"Except," soliloquised Arthur, "the Hereafter and—the grave."

His words produced a curious effect. Philip's eloquence broke off short, and for a moment a great fear crept into his eyes.

Silence ensued which neither of them seemed to care to break. Meanwhile the wind suddenly sprang up, and began to moan and sigh amongst the half-clad boughs of the trees outside—making, Arthur thought to himself, a very melancholy music. Presently Philip laid his hand upon his guest's arm, and he felt that it shook like an aspen-leaf.

"Tell me," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "what do you see there?"

Arthur started, and followed the direction of his eyes to the bare wall opposite the window, at the end of the room through which the door was made.

"I see," he said, "some moving shadows."

"What do they resemble?"

"I don't know; nothing in particular. What are they?"

"What are they?" hissed Philip, whose face was livid with terror, "can't you see?" Then came a pause.

"Ah! of course you are right, Heigham, quite right," ejaculated his host, presently, wiping the cold sweat from his brow; "it is nothing but the moonlight. How ridiculous of me! I suppose I am a little out of sorts—liver wrong. Give me some whisky, there's a good fellow, and I'll drink damnation to all shadows and *the trees that throw them.* Ha, ha, ha!"

There was something so excessively uncanny about his host's manner, that Arthur felt, had it not been for

Angela, he would not be sorry to get clear of him and his shadows as soon as possible, for superstition, he knew, is as contagious as small-pox. When at length he reached his great bare bed-chamber, not, by the way, a comfortable sort of place to sleep in after such an experience, it was only after some hours, tired though he was, that he could get the rest he needed.

CHAPTER IX.

A WALK AND A TALK.

NEXT morning, when they met at their eight o'clock breakfast, Arthur noticed that Angela was distressed about something.

"There is bad news," she said, almost before he greeted her; "my cousin George is very ill with typhus fever."

"Indeed!" remarked Arthur, rather coolly.

"Well, I must say it does not appear to distress you very much."

"No, I can't say it does. To be honest, I detest your cousin, and I don't care if he is ill or not; there!"

As she appeared to have no reply ready, the subject then dropped.

After breakfast Angela proposed that they should walk—for the day was again fine—to the top of a hill about a mile away, whence a view of the surrounding country could be obtained. He consented, and on the way told her of his curious experience with her father on the previous night. She listened attentively, and, when he had finished, shook her head.

"There is," she said, "something about my father that separates him from everybody else. His life never

comes out into the sunlight of the passing day; it always gropes along in the shadow of some gloomy past. What the mystery is which envelops him I neither know nor care to inquire; but I am sure that there is one."

"What are the shadows?"

"Nothing; under certain conditions of light, they are thrown by a great tree that grows some distance off. I have seen something that looks like figures on that wall myself in full daylight. That he should interpret such a simple thing as he does shows a curious state of mind."

"You do not think, then," said Arthur, in order to draw her out, "that it is possible, after all, that he was right? The reality of his terror was almost enough to make one believe in them, I can tell you."

"No, I do not," answered Angela, after a minute's thought. "I have no doubt that the veil between ourselves and the unseen is thinner than we think. I believe, too, that communication, and even warnings sometimes, can pass from the other world to ourselves, under favourable conditions, such as are induced by trouble or prayer. But the very fact of my father's terror proves to me that his shadows are nothing of the sort, for it is hardly possible that spirits can be permitted to come to terrify us poor mortals; if they come at all, it is in love and gentleness, to comfort or to warn, and not to work upon our superstitions."

"You speak as though you knew all about it; you should join the new Ghost Society," he answered, irreverently, sitting himself down on a fallen tree, an example that she followed.

"I have thought about it sometimes, that is all, and, so far as I have read, I think that my belief is a common one, and what the Bible teaches us. But now look

at the view; is it not beautiful in the sunlight? All the world seems to be rejoicing."

Angela was right; the view was charming. Below lay the thatched roofs of the little village of Bratham, and to the right the waters of the lake shone like silver in the glancing sunlight, whilst the gables of the old house, peeping out from amongst the budding foliage, looked very picturesque. The spring had cast her green garment over the land; from every copse rang out the melody of birds, and the gentle breeze was heavy with the scent of the unnumbered violets that starred the mossy carpet at their feet. In the fields where grew the wheat and clover, now springing into lusty life, the busy weeders were at work, and on the warm brown fallows the sower went forth to sow. From the early pastures beneath, where purled a little brook, there came a pleasant lowing of kine, well-contented with the new grass, and a cheerful bleating of lambs, to whom as yet life was nothing but one long skip. It was a happy scene, and its influence sank deep into the gazers' hearts.

"It is depressing to think," said Arthur, rather sententiously, but really chiefly with the object of getting at his companion's views, "that all this cannot last, but is, as it were, like ourselves, under sentence of death."

"It rose and fell and fleeted
Upon earth's troubled sea,
A wave that swells to vanish
Into eternity.
Oh! mystery and wonder
Of wings that cannot fly,
Of ears that cannot hearken,
Of life that lives—to die!"

quoth Angela, by way of comment.

"Whose lines are those?" asked Arthur. "I don't know them."

"My own," she said, shyly; "that is, they are a translation of a verse on a Greek ode I wrote for Mr. Fraser. I will say you the original, if you like; I think it better than the translation, and I believe that it is fair Greek."

"Thank you, thank you, Miss Blue-stocking; I am quite satisfied with your English version. You positively alarm me, Angela. Most people are quite content if they can put a poem written in English into Greek; you reverse the process, and, having coolly given expression to your thoughts in Greek, condescend to translate them into your native tongue. I only wish you had been at Cambridge, or—what do they call the place?—Girton. It would have been a joke to see you come out double-first."

"Ah!" she broke in, blushing, "you are like Mr. Fraser, you overrate my acquirements. I am sorry to say I am not the perfect scholar you think me, and about most things I am shockingly ignorant. I should indeed be silly if I did not know some classics and mathematics after ten years' patient work under such a scholar as Mr. Fraser. Why, do you know, for the last three years that we worked together, we used as a rule to carry on our ordinary conversations during work in Latin and Greek, month and month about, sometimes with the funniest results. One never understands how little one does know of a dead language till one tries to talk it. Just try to speak in Latin for the next five minutes, and you will see."

"Thank you, I am not going to expose my ignorance for your amusement, Angela."

She laughed.

"No," she said, "it is you who wish to amuse yourself at my expense by trying to make me believe that I

am a great scholar. But what I was going to say, before you attacked me about my fancied knowledge, was that, in my opinion, your remark about the whole world being under sentence of death, was rather a morbid one."

"Why? It is obviously true."

"Yes, in a sense; but to my mind this scene speaks more of resurrection than of death. Look at the earth pushing up her flowers, and the dead trees breaking into beauty. There is no sign of death there, but rather of a renewed and glorified life."

"Yes, but there is still the awful *fact* of death to face; Nature herself has been temporarily dead before she blooms into beauty; she dies every autumn, to rise again in the same form every spring. But how do we know in what form *we* shall emerge from the chrysalis? As soon as a man begins to think at all, he stands face to face with this hideous problem, to the solution of which he knows himself to be drawing daily nearer. His position, I often think, is worse than that of a criminal under sentence, because the criminal is only being deprived of the enjoyment of a term, indefinite, indeed, but absolutely limited; but man at large does not know of what he is deprived, and what he must inherit in the æons that await him. It is the uncertainty of death that is its most dreadful part and, with that hanging over our race, the wonder to me is not only that, for the most part, we put the subject entirely out of mind, but that we can ever think seriously of anything else."

"I remember," answered Angela, "once thinking very much in the same way, and I went to Mr. Fraser for advice. 'The Bible,' he said, 'will satisfy your doubts and fears, if only you will read it in a right spirit.' And indeed, more or less, it did. I cannot, of course, venture

to advise you, but I pass his advice on; it is that of a very good man."

"Have you, then, no dread of death, or, rather, of what lies beyond it?"

She turned her eyes upon him with something of wonder in them.

"And why," she said, "should I, who am immortal, fear a change that I know has no power to harm me; that can, on the contrary, only bring me nearer to the purpose of my being? Certainly I shrink from death itself, as we all must, but of the dangers beyond I have no fear. Pleasant as this world is at times, there is something in us all which strives to rise above it, and if I knew that I must die within this hour, I *believe* that I could meet my fate without a qualm. I am sure that when our trembling hands have drawn the veil from Death, we shall find his features, passionless indeed, but very beautiful."

Arthur looked at her with astonishment, wondering what manner of woman this could be, who, in the first flush of youth and beauty, could face the great unknown without a tremor. When he spoke again, it was with something of envious bitterness.

"Ah! it is very well for you, whose life has been so pure and free from evil, but it is different for me, with all my consciousness of sins and imperfections. For me, and thousands like me, strive as we will, immortality has terrors as well as hopes. It is, and always will be, human to fear the future, for our nature never changes. You know the lines in 'Hamlet.' It is

> 'that the dread of something after death,—
> The undiscovered country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns,—puzzles the will

> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of.
> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.'

They are true, and, while men last, they always will be true."

"Oh! Arthur," she answered, earnestly, and for the first time addressing him in conversation by his Christian name, "how limited your trust must be in the mercy of a Creator, whose mercy is as wide as the ocean, that you can talk like that! You speak of me, too, as better than yourself—how am I better? I have my bad thoughts and do bad things as much as you, and, though they may not be the same, I am sure they are quite as black as yours, since everybody must be responsible according to their characters and temptations. I try, however, to trust in God to cover my sins, and believe that, if I do my best, He will forgive me, that is all. But I have no business to preach to you, who are older and wiser than I am."

"If," he broke in, laying his hand involuntarily upon her own, "you knew—although I have never spoken of them to any one before, and could not speak of them to anybody but yourself—how these things weigh upon my mind, you would not say that, but would try to teach me your faith."

"How can I teach you, Arthur, when I have so much to learn myself?" she answered, simply, and from that moment, though she did not know it as yet, she loved him.

This conversation having come to an end—a very curious one, Arthur thought to himself afterwards, for two young people on a spring morning—nothing more was said for some while, and they took their way down the hill, varying the route in order to pass through the

little hamlet of Bratham. Under a chestnut-tree that stood upon the village green, Arthur noticed, *not* a village blacksmith, but a small crowd, mostly composed of children, gathered round somebody. On going to see who it was, he discovered a battered-looking old man with an intellectual face, and the remnants of a gentlemanlike appearance, playing on the violin. A very few touches of his bow told Arthur, who knew something of music, that he was in the presence of a performer of no mean merit. Seeing the quality of his two auditors, and that they appreciated his performance, the player changed his music, and from a village jig passed to one of the more difficult opera airs, which he executed in brilliant fashion.

"Bravo!" cried Arthur, as the last notes thrilled and died away; "I see you understand how to play the fiddle."

"Yes, sir, and so I should, for I have played first violin at Her Majesty's Opera before now. Name what you like, and I will play it you. Or, if you like it better, you shall hear the water running in a brook, the wind passing through the trees, or the waves falling on the beach. Only say the word."

Arthur thought for a moment.

"It is a beautiful day; let us have a contrast—give us the music of a storm."

The old man considered a while.

"I understand, but you set a difficult subject even for me," and taking up his bow he made several attempts at beginning. "I can't do it," he said, "set something else."

"No, no, try again; that or nothing."

Again he began, and this time his genius took possession of him. The notes fell very softly at first, but with an ominous sound, then rose and wailed like the

rising of the wind. Next the music came in gusts, the rain pattered, and the thunder roared, till at length the tempest seemed to spend its force and pass slowly away into the distance.

"There, sir, what do you say to that—have I fulfilled your expectations?"

"Write it down and it will be one of the finest pieces of violin music in the country."

"Write it down. The divine 'afflatus' is not to be caged, sir, it comes and goes. I could never write that music down."

Arthur felt in his pocket without answering, and found five shillings.

"If you will accept this?" he said.

"Thank you, sir, very much. I am gladder of five shillings now than I once was of as many pounds;" and he rose to go.

"A man of your talent should not be wandering about like this."

"I must earn a living somehow, for all Talleyrand's witticism to the contrary," was the curious answer.

"Have you no friends?"

"No, sir, this is my only friend; all the rest have deserted me," and he tapped his violin and was gone.

"Lord, sir," said a farmer, who was standing by, "he's gone to get drunk; he is the biggest old drunkard in the countryside, and yet they do say that he was a gentleman once, and the best fiddler in London; but he can't be depended on, so no one will hire him now."

"How sad!" said Angela, as they moved homewards.

"Yes, and what music that was; I never heard any with such imagination before. You have a turn that

way, Angela; you should try to put it into words, it would make a poem."

"I complain, like the old man, that you set a difficult subject," she said; "but I will try if you will promise not to laugh at the result."

"If you succeed on paper only half so well as he did on the violin, your verses will be worth listening to, and I certainly shall not laugh."

CHAPTER X.

A STORM ON THE STRINGS.

On the day following the somewhat curious religious conversation between Arthur and Angela—a conversation which, begun on Arthur's part out of curiosity, had ended on both sides very much in earnest—the weather broke up and the grand old English climate reasserted its treacherous supremacy. From summer weather the inhabitants of the county of Marlshire suddenly found themselves plunged into a spell of cold that by contrast was almost Arctic. Storms of sleet drove against the window-panes, and there was even a very damaging night-frost, while that dreadful scourge, which nobody in his senses except Kingsley *can* ever have liked, the east wind, literally pervaded the whole place, and went whistling through the surrounding trees and ruins in a way calculated to make even a Laplander shiver.

Under these cheerless circumstances, our pair of companions—for, ostensibly at any rate, they were as yet nothing more—gave up their outdoor excursions and took to rambling over the disused rooms in the old house, and to the hunting up of many a record, some of them valuable and curious enough, of long-forgotten Caresfoots,

and even of the old priors before them; a splendidly illuminated missal being amongst the latter prizes. When this amusement was exhausted, they sat together over the fire in the nursery, and Angela translated to him from her favourite classical authors, especially Homer, with an ease and fluency of expression that, to Arthur, was little short of miraculous. Or, when they got tired of that, he read to her from standard writers, which she had scarcely yet even opened, elaborate as her education had been, in certain respects, notably Shakespeare and Milton. Needless to say, imbued as she was with a strong poetic feeling, these immortal writers were a source of intense delight to Angela.

"How is it that Mr. Fraser never gave you Shakespeare to read?" asked Arthur one day, as he shut up the volume, having come to the end of "Hamlet."

"He said that I should be better able to appreciate it when my mind had been prepared to do so by the help of a classical and mathematical education, and that it would be 'a mistake to cloy my mental palate with sweets before I had learnt to appreciate their flavours.'"

"There is some sense in that," remarked Arthur. "By the way, how are the verses getting on which you promised to write me? Have you done them yet?"

"I have done something," she answered, modestly, "but I really do not think that they are worth producing. It is very tiresome of you to have remembered about them."

Arthur, however, by this time knew enough of Angela's abilities to be sure that her "something" would be something more or less worth hearing, and mildly insisted on their production, and then, to her confusion, on reading them aloud. They ran as follows, and, whatever Angela's

opinion of them may have been, the reader shall judge of them for himself:

A STORM ON THE STRINGS.

"The minstrel sat in his lonely room,
Its walls were bare, and the twilight grey
Fell and crept and gathered to gloom;
It came like the ghost of the dying day,
And the chords fell hushed and low.

Pianissimo!

"His arm was raised, and the violin
Quivered and shook with the strain it bore,
While the swelling forth of the sounds within
Rose with a sweetness unknown before,
And the chords fell soft and low.

Piano!

* * * * *

"The first cold flap of the tempest's wings
Clashed with the silence before the storm,
The raindrops pattered across the strings
As the gathering thunder-clouds took form—
Drip, drop, high and low.

Staccato!

"Heavily rolling the thunder roared,
Sudden and jagged the lightning played,
Faster and faster the raindrops poured,
Sobbing and surging the tree-crests swayed,
Cracking and crashing above, below.

Crescendo!

"The wind tore howling across the wold,
And tangled his train in the groaning trees
Wrapped the dense clouds in his mantle cold,
Then shivered and died in a wailing breeze,
Whistling and weeping high and low.

Sostenuto!

"A pale sun broke from the driving cloud,
And flashed in the raindrops serenely cool:
At the touch of his finger the forest bowed,

As it shimmered and glanced in the ruffled pool,
While the rustling leaves soughed soft and low.
Grazioso!

* * * * *

"It was only a dream on the throbbing strings,
An echo of Nature in phantasy wrought,
A breath of her breath and a touch of her wings
From a kingdom outspread in the regions of thought.
Below rolled the sound of the city's din,
And the fading day, as the night drew in,
Showed the quaint old face and the pointed chin,
And the arm that was raised o'er the violin,
As the old man whispered his hope's dead tale
To the friend who could comfort, though others might fail,
And the chords stole hushed and low.
Pianissimo!"

He stopped, and the sheet of paper fell from his hands.
"Well," she said, "tell me, do you think them *very* bad?"
"Well, Angela, you know——"
"Go on. Pray don't spare my feelings."
"Don't interrupt; I was going to say that I think the piece above the average of second-class poetry, and that two of the lines touch a first-class standard. But I do not think that you will ever be popular as a writer of verses if you keep to that style."
"I do not wish to be popular. I only wrote the lines to please you," Angela answered.
"Well, my dear, I am sure I am much obliged to you; I shall value them doubly, once for the giver's sake, and once for their own."
Angela blushed, but did not reprove the term of endearment which had slipped unawares from his lips. Poetry is a dangerous suject between two young people who at heart adore one another; it is apt to excite the brain, and bring about startling revelations.

The day following the reading of Angela's piece of poetry was rendered remarkable by two events, of which the first was that the weather suddenly turned a sommersault, and became beautifully warm; and the second that news reached the Abbey House that, thanks chiefly to Lady Bellamy's devoted nursing—who, fearless of infection, had, to the great admiration of all her neighbours, volunteered her services—George was pronounced out of danger. This piece of news was peculiarly grateful to Philip, for, had his cousin died, the estates must have passed away for ever under the terms of his uncle's will, for he knew that George had made none. Angela, too, tried, like the good girl that she was, to lash herself into enthusiasm about it, though in her heart, since his attempted indignity towards herself, she went as near hating her cousin as her gentle nature would allow. Arthur alone was cynically indifferent; he hated George without any reservation whatsoever.

And after this there came for our pair of embryo lovers some ten or twelve happy days. There was no talk of Arthur's departure, Philip having on several occasions pointedly told him that the house was at his disposal for as long as he chose to remain in it. The sky was blue in those days, or only flecked with summer clouds, just as Arthur and Angela's perfect companionship was flecked and shaded with the deeper hues of dawning passion. Alas, in this terrestrial clime the sky is never *quite* blue!

But as yet nothing of love had passed between them, no kiss or word of endearment; only when hand touched hand a strange thrill had moved them both, and sent the warm blood to stain Angela's clear brow, like a wavering tint of sunlight thrown upon the marble features of some

white Venus; only in each other's eyes they found a mystery. The spell was not yet fully at work, but the wand of earth's great enchanter had touched them, and they were changed. Angela is hardly the same girl she was when we met her a little more than a fortnight back. A nameless change has come over her face and manner; the merry smile, once so bright, has grown softer and more sweet, and the laughing light of her grey eyes has given place to a look of some such gratitude and wonder, as that with which the traveller in lonely deserts gazes on the oasis of his rest.

Many times Arthur had almost blurted out the truth to the woman he passionately adored, and every day so added to the suppressed fire of his love that at length he felt that he could not keep his secret to himself much longer. And yet he feared to tell it; better, he thought, to live happy, if in doubt, than to risk all his fortune on a single throw, for before his eyes there lay the black dread of failure; and then, what would life be worth? Here with Angela he lived in a Garden of Eden that no forebodings, no anxieties, no fear of that partially scotched serpent George, could render wretched, so long as it was gladdened by the presence of her whom he hoped to make his Eve. But without, and around where she could not be, there was nothing but clods and thistles and a black desolation that, even in imagination, he dared not face.

And Angela, gazing on veiled mysteries with wondering eyes, was she happy during those spring-tide days? Almost; but still there was in her heart a consciousness of effort, a sense of transformation and knowledge of the growth of hidden things. The bud bursting into the glory of the rose, if there be feeling in a rose, must

undergo some such effort before it can make its beauty known; the butterfly but newly freed from the dull husk that hid its splendours, at first must feel the imperfect wings it stretches in the sun to be irksome to its unaccustomed sense. And so it was with Angela; she spread her half-grown wings in the sun of her new existence, and found them strange, not knowing as yet that they were shaped to bear her to the flower-crowned heights of love.

Hers was one of those rare natures in which the passion that we know by the generic term of love, approached as near perfection as is possible in our human hearts. For there are many sorts and divisions of love, ranging from the affection, pure, steady, and divine, that is showered upon us from above, to the degrading madness of such a one as George Caresfoot. It is surely one of the saddest evidences of our poor humanity that, even among the purest of us, there are none who can altogether rid the whiteness of the love they have to offer of its earthly stain. Indeed, if we could so far conquer the promptings of our nature as to love with perfect purity, we should become like angels. But, just as white flowers are sometimes to be found on the blackest peak, so there do bloom in the world spirits as pure as they are rare —so free from evil, so closely shadowed by the Almighty wing, that they can almost reach to this perfection. Then the love they have to give is too refined, too holy and strong, to be understood of the mass of men; often it is squandered on some unequal and unanswering nature; sometimes it is wisely offered up to Him from whom it came.

We gaze upon an ice-bound river, and there is nothing to tell us that beneath that white cloak its current

rushes to the ocean. But presently the spring comes, the prisoned waters burst their fetters, and we see a glad torrent sparkling in the sunlight. And so it was with the heart of Angela; the breath of her lover's passion and the light of her lover's eyes had beat upon it, and almost freed the river of its love. Already the listener might hear the ice-sheets crack and start; soon they will be gone, and her deep devotion will set as strong towards him as the tide of the torrent towards its receiving sea.

"Fine writing!" perhaps the reader will say; but surely none too fine to describe the most beautiful thing in this strange world, the irrevocable gift of a good woman's love!

However that may be, it will have served its purpose if it makes it clear that a crisis is at hand in the affairs of the heart of two of the actors on our stage.

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUEEN OF HAPPY THINGS.

One Saturday morning, when May was three-parts gone, Philip announced his intention of going up to London till the Monday on business. He was a man who had long since become callous to appearances, and though Arthur, fearful lest spiteful things should be said of Angela, almost hinted that it would look odd, his host merely laughed, and said that he had little doubt but that his daughter was quite able to look after herself, even when such a fascinating young gentleman as himself was concerned. As a matter of fact, his object was to get rid of Angela by marrying her to this young

Heigham, who had so opportunely tumbled down from the skies, and whom he rather liked than otherwise. This being the case, he rightly concluded that the more the two were left together, the greater probability there was of his object being attained. Accordingly he left them together as much as possible.

It was on the evening of this Saturday that Arthur gathered up his courage and asked Angela to come and walk through the ruins with him. Angela hesitated a little: the shadow of something about to happen had fallen on her mind; but the beauty of the evening, to say nothing of the prospect of his company, turned the scale in Arthur's favour.

It was one of those nights of which, if we are lucky, we get some five or six in the course of an English summer. The moon was at her full, and, the twilight ended, she filled the heavens with her light. Every twig and blade of grass showed out as clearly as in the day, but looked like frosted silver. The silence was intense, and so still was the air that the sharp shadows of the trees were motionless upon the grass, only growing with the growing hours. It was one of those nights that fill us with an indescribable emotion, bringing us into closer companionship with the unseen than ever does the garish, busy day. In such an hour, we can sometimes feel, or think that we can feel, other presences around us, and involuntarily we listen for the whisper of the wings and the half-forgotten voices of our lost beloved.

On this particular evening some such feeling was stirring in Angela's heart as with slow steps she led the way into the little village churchyard, a similar spot to that which is to be found in many a country parish, except that the population being very small, there were but few

recent graves. Most of the mounds had no head-stones to recall the names of the neglected dead, but here and there were dotted discoloured slabs, some sunk a foot or two into the soil, a few lying prone upon it, and the remainder thrown by the gradual subsidence of their supports into every variety of angle, as though they had suddenly halted in the maddest whirl of a grotesque dance of death.

Picking her way through these, Angela stopped under an ancient yew, and, pointing to one of two shadowed mounds to which the moonlight scarcely struggled, said, in a low voice—

"That is my mother's grave."

It was a modest tenement enough, a little heap of close green turf, surrounded by a railing, and planted with sweet-williams and forget-me-nots. At its head was placed a white marble cross, on which Arthur could just distinguish the words "Hilda Caresfoot," and the date of death.

He was about to speak, but she stopped him with a gentle movement, and then, stepping forward to the head of the railing, she buried her face in her hands, and remained motionless. Arthur watched her with curiosity. What, he wondered, was passing in the mind of this strange and beautiful woman, who had grown up so sweet and pure amidst moral desolation, like a white lily blooming alone on the black African plains in winter? Suddenly she raised her head, and saw the inquiring look he bent upon her. She came towards him, and in that sweet, half-pleading voice which was one of her greatest charms, she said—

"I fear you think me very foolish?"

"Why should I think you foolish?"

"Because I have come here at night to stand before a half-forgotten grave."

"I do not think you foolish, indeed. I was only wondering what was passing in your mind."

Angela hung her head and made no answer, and the clock above them boomed out the hour, raising its sullen note in insolent defiance of the silence. What is it that is so solemn about the striking of the belfry-clock when we stand in a churchyard at night? Is it that the hour softens our natures, and makes them more amenable to semi-superstitious influences? Or is it that the evidences of departed mortality which surround us, appealing with dumb force to natural fears, throw open for a space the gates of our world-sealed imagination, to tenant it with prophetic echoes of our end? Perhaps it is useless to inquire. The result remains the same: few of us can hear those tones at night without a qualm, and, did we put our thoughts into words, they would run after this fashion:

"That sound once broke upon the living ears of those who sleep around us. We hear it now. In a little while, hour after hour, it will echo against the tombstones of *our* graves, and new generations, coming out of the silent future, will stand where we stand, and hearken; and muse, as we mused, over the old problems that we have gone to solve; whilst we—shall we not be deaf to hear and dumb to utter?"

Such, at any rate, were the unspoken thoughts that crept into the hearts of Arthur and Angela as the full sound of the belfry thinned itself away into silence. She grew a little pale, and glanced at him, and he shivered involuntarily, while even the dog Aleck sniffed and whined uncomfortably.

"It feels cold," he said. "Shall we go?"

They turned and walked towards the gate, and, by the time they reached it, all superstitious thoughts had vanished—at any rate, from Arthur's mind, for he recollected that he had set himself a task to do, and that now would be the time to do it. Absorbed in this reflection, he forgot his politeness, and passed first through the turnstile. On the further side he paused, and looked earnestly into his beloved's face. Their eyes met, and there was that in his that caused Angela to swiftly drop her own. A silence ensued as they stood by the gate. He broke it.

"It is a lovely night. Let us walk through the ruins."

"I shall wet my feet: the dew must be falling."

"There is no dew falling to-night. Won't you come?"

"Let us go to-morrow; it is later than *I* generally go in. Pigott will wonder what has become of me."

"Never mind Pigott. The night is too fine to waste asleep; besides, you know, one should always look at ruins by moonlight. Please come."

She looked at him doubtfully, hesitated, and came.

"What do you want to see?" she said, presently, with as near an approach to irritation as he had ever heard her indulge in. "That is the famous window which Mr. Fraser always goes into raptures about."

"It is beautiful. Shall we sit down here and look at it?"

They sat down on a low mass of fallen masonry some fifteen paces from the window. Around them lay a delicate tracery of shadows, whilst they themselves were seated in the eye of the moonlight, and remained for a while as silent and as still as though they had been the

shades of the painted figures that had once filled the stony frame above them.

"Angela," he said at length—"Angela, listen, and I will tell you something. My mother, a woman to whom sorrow had become almost an inspiration, when she was dying, spoke to me something thus: 'There is,' she said, 'but one thing that I know of that has the power to make life happy as God meant it to be, and as the folly and weakness of men and women render it nearly impossible for it to be, and that is—love. Love has been the consolation of my own existence in the midst of many troubles; first, the great devotion I bore your father, and then that which I entertain for yourself. Without these two ties, life would indeed have been a desert. And yet, though it is a grief to me to leave you, and though I shrink from the dark passage which lies before me, so far does that first great love outweigh the love I bear you, that in my calmer moments I am glad to go, because I know I am awaited by your father. And from this I wish you to learn a lesson: look for your happiness in life from the love of your life, for there only will you find it. Do not fritter away your heart, but seek out some woman, some one good and pure and true, and in giving her your devotion, you will reap a full reward, for her happiness will reflect your own, and, if your choice is right, however stormy your life may be, you will lay up for yourself, as I feel that I have done, an everlasting joy.'"

She listened to him in silence.

"Angela," he went on, boldly enough, now that the ice was broken, "I have often thought about what my mother said, but until now I have never *quite* understood

her meaning. I do understand it now. Angela, do *you* understand me?"

There was no answer; she sat there upon the fallen masonry, gazing at the ruins round her, motionless and white as a marble goddess, forgotten in her desecrated fane.

"Oh, Angela, listen to me—listen to me! I have found the woman of whom my mother spoke, who must be so 'good and pure and true.' You are she. I love you, Angela, I love you with my whole life and soul; I love you for this world and the next. Oh! do not reject me; though I am so little worthy of you, I will try to grow so. Dearest, can you love me?"

Still there was silence, but he thought that he saw her breast heave gently. Then, all trembling with the fierce emotion that throbbed along his veins, he placed his hand upon the palm that hung listless by her side, and gazed into her eyes. Still Angela neither spoke nor shrank, and, in the imperfect light, her face looked very pale, while her lovely eyes were dark and meaningless as those of one entranced.

Then slowly he gathered up his courage for an effort, and, raising his face to the level of her own, he kissed her full upon her lips. She stirred, she sighed. He had broken the spell; the sweet face that had withdrawn itself drew nearer to him; for a second the awakened eyes looked into his own, and filled them with reflected splendour, and then he became aware of a warm arm thrown about his neck, and next—the stars grew dim, and sense and life itself seemed to shake within him, for a joy almost too great for mortal man to bear took possession of his heart as Angela laid her willing lips upon his own. And then, before he knew

her purpose, she slid down upon her knees beside him, and placed her head upon his breast.

"Dearest," he said, "don't kneel so; look at me."

Slowly she raised her face, wreathed and lovely with many blushes, and looked upon him with tearful eyes. He tried to raise her.

"Let me be," she said, speaking very low, "I am best so; it is the attitude of adoration, and I have found —my divinity."

"But I cannot bear to see you kneel to me."

"Oh! Arthur, you do not understand; a minute since *I* did not understand that a woman is very humble when she really loves."

"Do you —really love me, Angela?"

"I do."

"Have you known that long?"

"I only *knew* it when—when you kissed me. Before then there was something in my heart, but I did not know what it was. Listen, dear," she went on, "for one minute to me first, and I will get up" (for he was again attempting to raise her). "What I have to say is best said upon my knees, for I want to thank God who sent you to me, and to thank you too for your goodness. It is so wonderful that you should love a simple girl like I am, and I am so thankful to you. Oh! I have never lived till now, and" (rising to her full stature) "I feel as though I had been crowned a queen of happy things. Dethrone me, desert me, and I will still be grateful to you for this hour of imperial happiness. But if, after a while, when you know all my faults and imperfections better, you can still care for me, I know that there is something in me that will enable me to repay you for what you have given me, by making your

whole life happy. Dear, I do not know if I speak as other women do, but, believe me, it is out of the fulness of my heart. Take care, Arthur, oh! take care, lest your fate should be that of the magician you spoke of the other day, who evoked the spirit, and then fell down before it in terror. You have also called up a spirit, and I pray that it was not done in sport, lest it should trouble you hereafter."

"Angela, do not speak so to me; it is I who should have knelt to you. You were right when you called yourself a 'queen of happy things.' You are a queen——"

"Hush; Don't overrate me; your disillusion will be the more painful. Come, Arthur, let us go home."

He rose and went with her, in a dream of joy that for a moment precluded speech. At the door she bade him good-night, and gave him her lips to kiss. Then they parted, their hearts too full for words. One thing he asked her, however.

"What was it that took you to your mother's grave to-night?"

She looked at him with a curiously mixed expression of shy love and conviction on her face, and answered—

"Her spirit, who led me to your heart."

CHAPTER XII.

LADY BELLAMY MAKES AN OFFER.

GEORGE'S recovery, when the doctors had given up all hope, was sufficiently marvellous to suggest the idea that a certain power had determined—on the hangman's principle, perhaps—to give him the longest of ropes; but it could in reality be traced to a more terrestrial influence—namely, Lady Bellamy's nursing. Had it not been for this nursing, it is very certain that her patient would have joined his forefathers in the Bratham churchyard. For whole days and nights she watched and tended him, scarcely closing her own eyes, and quite heedless of the danger of infection; till in the end she conquered the fever, and snatched him from the jaws of the grave. How often has not a woman's devotion been successful in such a struggle!

On the Monday following the events narrated in the last chapter, George, now in an advanced stage of convalescence, though forbidden to go abroad for another fortnight, was sitting downstairs enjoying the warm sunshine, and the sensation of returning life and vigour that was creeping into his veins, when Lady Bellamy came into the room, bringing with her some medicine.

"Here is your tonic, George; it is the last dose that I can give you, as I am going back to my disconsolate husband at luncheon-time."

"I can't have you go away yet; I am not well enough."

"I must go, George; people will begin to talk if I stop here any longer."

"Well, if you must, I suppose you must," he an-

swered sulkily. "But I must say I think that you show a great want of consideration for my comfort. Who is to look after me, I should like to know? I am far from well yet—far from well."

"Believe me," she said, softly, "I am very sorry to leave you, and am glad to have been of help to you, though you have never thought much about it."

"Oh, I am sure I am much obliged, but it is not likely that you would leave me to rot of fever without coming to look after me."

She sighed as she answered—

"You would not do as much for me."

"Oh, bother, Anne, don't get sentimental. Before you go, I must speak to you about that girl Angela. Have you taken any steps?"

Lady Bellamy started.

"What, are you still bent upon that project?"

"Of course I am. It seemed to me that all my illness was one long dream of her. I am more bent upon it than ever."

"And do you still insist upon my playing the part you had marked out for me? Do you know, George, that there were times in your illness when, if I had relaxed my care for a single five minutes, it would have turned the scale against you, and that once I did not close my eyes for five nights? Look at me, how thin and worn I am: it is from nursing you. I have saved your life. Surely you will not now force me to do this unnatural thing?"

"If, my dear Anne, you had saved my life fifty times, I would still force you to do it. Ah! it is no use your looking at that safe. I have no doubt that you got my keys and searched it whilst I was ill, but I was too sharp

for you. I had the letters moved when I heard that you were coming to nurse me. They are back there now, though. How disappointed you must have been!" And he chuckled.

"I should have done better to let you die, monster of wickedness and ingratitude that you are!" she said, stamping her foot upon the floor, and the tears of vexation standing in her eyes.

"The letters, my dear Anne; remember that you have got to earn your letters. I am very much obliged to you for your nursing, but business is business."

She was silent for a moment, and then spoke in her ordinary tone.

"By the way, talking of letters, there was one came for you this morning in your cousin Philip's handwriting, and with a London postmark. Will you read it?"

"Read it—yes; anything from the father of my innamorata will be welcome."

She fetched the letter and gave it him. He read it aloud. After a page of congratulations on his convalescence, it ended—

"And now I want to make a proposal to you—viz., to buy back the Isleworth lands from you. I know that the place is distasteful to you, and will probably be doubly so after your severe illness; but, if you care to keep the house and grounds, I am not particularly anxious to acquire them. I am prepared to offer a good price," &c. &c.

"I'll see him hanged first," was George's comment. "How did he get the money?"

"Saved it and made it, I suppose."

"Well, at any rate, he shall not buy me out with it. No, no, Master Philip; I am not fond enough of you to do you that turn."

"It does not strike you," she said, coldly, "that you hold in your hands a lever that may roll all your difficulties about this girl out of the way."

"By Jove, you are right, Anne. Trust a woman's brain. But I don't want to sell the estates unless I am forced to."

"Would you rather part with the land, or give up your project of marrying Angela Caresfoot?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because you will have to choose between the two."

"Then I had rather sell."

"You had better give it up, George. I am not superstitious, but I have knowledge that you do not understand, and I foresee nothing but disaster in this plan."

"Once and for all, Anne, I will not give it up whilst I have any breath left in my body, and I take my oath that unless you help me, and help me honestly, I will expose you."

"Oh! I am your very humble servant; you may count on me. The galley-slave pulls well when the lash hangs over his shoulders," and she laughed coldly.

Just then a servant announced that Mr. Caresfoot was at the door, and anxious to speak to his cousin. He was ordered to show him into the drawing-room. As soon as he had gone on his errand, George said—

"I will not see him; say I am too unwell. But do you go, and see that you make the most of your chance."

Lady Bellamy nodded, and left the room. She found Philip in the drawing-room.

"Ah! how do you do, Mr. Caresfoot? I come from your cousin to say that he cannot see you to-day; he has scarcely recovered sufficiently from the illness through

which I have been nursing him; but of course you know all about that."

"Oh! yes, Lady Bellamy, I have heard all about it, including your own brave behaviour, to which, the doctor tells me, George owes his life. I am sorry that he cannot see me, though. I have just come down from town, and called in on my way from Roxham. I had some rather important business that I wanted to speak about."

"About your offer to repurchase the Isleworth lands?" she asked.

"Ah! you know of the affair. Yes, that was it."

"Then I am commissioned to give you a reply."

Philip listened anxiously.

"Your cousin absolutely refuses to sell any part of the lands."

"Will nothing change his determination? I am ready to give a good price, and pay a separate valuation for the timber."

"Nothing; he does not intend to sell."

A deep depression spread itself over her hearer's face.

"Then there go the hopes of twenty years," he said. "For twenty long years, ever since my misfortune, I have toiled and schemed to get these lands back, and now it is all for nothing. Well, there is nothing more to be said," and he turned to go.

"Stop a minute, Mr. Caresfoot. Do you know, you interest me very much."

"I am proud to interest so charming a lady," he answered, with a touch of depressed gallantry.

"That is as it should be; but you interest me because you are an instance of the truth of the saying that every man has some ruling passion, if only one could discover

it. Why do you want these particular lands? Your money will buy others just as good."

"Why does a Swiss get home-sick? Why does a man defrauded of his own wish to recover it?"

Lady Bellamy mused a little.

"What would you say if I showed you an easy way to get them?"

Philip turned sharply round with a new look of hope upon his face.

"You would earn my eternal gratitude—a gratitude that I should be glad to put into a practical shape."

She laughed.

"Oh! you must speak to Sir John about that. Now listen; I am going to surprise you. Your cousin wants to get married."

"Get married! George wants to get married!"

"Exactly so; and now I have a further surprise in store for you—he wants to marry your daughter Angela."

This time Philip said nothing, but he started in evident and uncomfortable astonishment. If Lady Bellamy wished to surprise him, she had certainly succeeded.

"Surely you are joking!" he said.

"I never was further from joking in my life; he is desperately in love with her, and wild to marry her."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you now see a way to force your cousin to sell the lands?"

"As the price of Angela's hand?"

"Precisely."

Philip walked up and down the room in thought. Though, as the reader may remember, he had himself, but a month before, been base enough to suggest that his daughter should use her eyes to forward his projects,

he had never, in justice to him be it said, dreamt of forcing her into a marriage in every way little less than unnatural. His idea of responsibility towards his daughter was, as regards sins of omission, extremely lax, but there were some of commission that he did not care to face. Certain fears and memories oppressed him too much to allow of it.

"Lady Bellamy," he said, presently, "you have known my cousin George intimately for many years, and are probably sufficiently acquainted with his habits of life to be aware that such a marriage would be an infamy."

"Many a man who has been wild in his youth makes a good husband," she answered, quietly.

"The more I think of it," went on Philip, excitedly, after the fashion of one who would lash himself into a passion, "the more I see the utter impossibility of any such thing, and I must say that I wonder at your having undertaken such an errand. On the one hand, there is a young girl who, though I do not, from force of circumstances, see much of her myself, is, I believe, as good as she is handsome——"

"And on the other," broke in Lady Bellamy, ironically, "are the Isleworth estates."

"And on the other," went on Philip, without paying heed to her remark—"I am going to speak plainly, Lady Bellamy—is a man utterly devoid of the foundations of moral character, whose appearance is certainly against him, who I have good reason to know is not to be trusted, and who is old enough to be her father, and her cousin to boot—and you ask me to forward such a marriage as this! I will have nothing to do with it; my responsibilities as a father forbid it. It would be the wickedest thing I have ever done to put the girl into the power of such a man."

Lady Bellamy burst into a low peal of laughter: she never laughed aloud. She thought that it was now time to throw him a little off his balance.

"Forgive me," she said, with her sweetest smile, "but you must admit that there is something rather ludicrous in hearing the hero of the great Maria Lee scandal talking about moral character, and the father who detests his daughter so much that he fears to look her in the face, and whose sole object is to rid himself of an encumbrance, prating of his paternal responsibilities."

Philip started visibly at her words.

"Ah! Mr. Caresfoot," she went on, "I surprise you by my knowledge, but we women are sad spies, and it is my little amusement to find out other people's secrets, a very useful little amusement. I could tell you many things——"

"I was about to say," broke in Philip, who had naturally no desire to see more of the secrets of his life unveiled by Lady Bellamy, "that, even if I did wish to get rid of Angela, I should have little difficulty in doing so, as young Heigham, who has been stopping at the Abbey House for a fortnight or so, is head over ears in love with her; indeed, I should think it highly probable that they are at this moment engaged."

It was Lady Bellamy's turn to start now.

"Ah!" she said, "I did not know that; that complicates matters." And then with a sudden change of tone—"Mr. Caresfoot, as a friend, let me beg of you not to throw away such a chance in a hurry for the sake of a few nonsensical ideas about a girl. What is she, after all, that she should stand in the way of such grave interests as you have in hand? I tell you that he is per-

fectly mad about her. You can make your own terms and fix your own price."

"Price! ay, that is what it would be—a price for her body and soul."

"Well, and what of it? The thing is done every day, only one does not talk of it in that way."

"Who taught you, who were once a young girl yourself, to plead such a cause as this?"

"Nonsense, it is a very good cause—a cause that will benefit everybody, especially your daughter. George will get what he wants; you, with the recovery of the estates, will also recover your lost position and reputation, both to a great extent an affair of landed property. Mr. Heigham will gain a little experience, whilst she will bloom into a great lady, and, like any other girl in the same circumstance, learn to adore her husband in a few months."

"And what will *you* get, Lady Bellamy?"

"I!" she replied, with a gay laugh. "Oh! you know, virtue is its own reward. I shall be quite satisfied in seeing everybody else made happy. Come, I do not want to press you about the matter at present. Think it over at your leisure. I only beg you not to give a decided answer to young Heigham, should he ask you for Angela, till I have seen you again—say, in a week's time. Then, if you don't like it, you can leave it alone, and nobody will be a penny the worse."

"As you like; but I tell you that I can never consent;" and Philip took his leave.

"Your cousin entirely refuses his consent, and Angela is by this time probably engaged to your ex-ward, Arthur Heigham," was Lady Bellamy's not very promising report to the interesting invalid in the dining-room.

After relieving his feelings at this intelligence in language more forcible than polite, George remarked that, under these circumstances, matters looked very bad.

"Not at all; they look very well. I shall see your cousin again in a week's time, when I shall have a different tale to tell."

"Why wait a week with that young blackguard making the running on the spot?"

"Because I have put poison into Philip's mind, and the surest poison always works slow. Besides, the mischief has been done. Good-bye. I will come and see you in a day or two, when I have made my plans. You see I mean to earn my letters."

CHAPTER XIII.

IT WILL BE AS I SAY.

With what degree of soundness our pair of lovers slumbered on that memorable Saturday night, let those form their own opinion who have been so fortunate or unfortunate as to have been placed in analogous circumstances.

It is, however, certain that Arthur gazed upon the moon and sundry of the larger planets for some hours, until they unkindly set, and left him, for his candle had burnt out, to find his way to bed in the dark. With his reflections we will not trouble ourselves; or, rather, we will not intrude upon their privacy. But there was another person in the house who also sat at an open window and looked upon the heavens—Angela to wit. Let us avail ourselves of our rightful privilege, and look into her thoughts.

Arthur's love had come upon her as a surprise, but

it had found a perfect home. All the days and hours that she had spent in his company, unknown to herself, had been mysteriously employed in preparing a habitation to receive it. We all know the beautiful Bible story of the Creation, how first there was an empty void, and the Spirit brooding on the waters, then light, then life, and last, man coming to turn all things to his uses. Surely that story, which is the type and symbol of many things, is of none more so than of the growth and birth of a perfected love in the human heart!

The soil is made ready in the dead winter, and receives the seed into its bosom. Now comes the spring, and it is clothed with verdure. Space is void till the sun shoots its sudden rays athwart it, and makes it splendid; the heart is cold and unwitting of its ends, till the spirit broods upon it, as upon the waters, and it grows quick with the purposes of life. And then what a change is there! What has the flower in common with the seed from whence it sprang, or the noonday sky with the darkness before the dawn?

Thinking in her chamber, with the night air playing on her hot brow, and her hand pressed upon her heart, as though to still the tumult of its joy, Angela grew vaguely conscious of these things.

"Was she the same in heart and mind that she had been a month ago? No, a thousand times no. Then what was this mysterious change that seemed to shake her inmost life to its foundations? What angel had troubled the waters into which she had so newly plunged? And whence came the healing virtue that she found in them, bringing rest after the vague trouble of the last two weeks, with sight to see the only good—her love, with speed to follow, and strength to hold? Oh, happy,

happy world! oh, merciful Creator, who gave her to drink of such a living spring! oh, Arthur, beloved Arthur!"

On Sunday mornings it was Pigott's habit to relax the Draconian severity of her laws in the matter of breakfast, which, generally speaking, was not till about half-past eight o'clock. At that hour precisely, on the Sabbath in question, she appeared as usual—no, not as usual, for, it being Sunday, she had on her stiff, black gown—and, with all due solemnity, made the tea.

A few minutes elapsed, and Angela entered, dressed in white, and very lovely in her simple tight-fitting robe, but a trifle pale, and with a shy look upon her face.

She greeted her nurse with a kiss.

"Why, what is the matter with you, dearie?" ejaculated Pigott, whose watchful eye detected a change she could not define; "you look different somehow."

"Hush! I will tell you by-and-by."

At that moment Arthur's quick step was heard advancing down the passage, together with a pattering noise that announced the presence of Aleck. And, as they came, Angela, poor Angela, grew red and redder, and yet more painfully red, till Pigott, watching her face, was enabled to form a shrewd guess as to what was the cause of her unaccustomed looks.

On came the steps and open flew the door; more and more ready to sink into the earth looked Angela, and so interested grew nurse Pigott, that she actually poured some hot tea on to her dress, a thing she could never remember having done before.

The first to enter was Aleck, who, following his custom, sprang upon Angela and licked her hand, and behind Aleck, looking somewhat confused, but handsome

and happy—for his was one of those faces that become handsome when their owners are happy—came Aleck's master. And then there ensued an infinitesimal but most awkward pause.

On such occasions as the present, namely, the first meeting after an engagement, there is always—especially when it occurs in the presence of a third person—a very considerable difficulty in the minds of the parties to know what demeanour they are to adopt towards one another. Are they to treat the little affair of the previous evening as a kind of confidential communication, not to be alluded to except in private conversation, and to drop into the Mr. and Miss of yesterday? That would certainly be the easiest, but then it would also be a decided act of mutual retreat. Or are they to rush into each other's arms as becomes betrothed lovers? This process is so new that they feel that it still requires private rehearsal. And, meanwhile, time presses, and everybody is beginning to stare, and something *must* be done.

These were very much the feelings of Arthur and Angela. He hesitated before her, confused, and she kept her head down over the dog. But presently Aleck, getting bored, moved on, and, as it would have been inane to continue to stare at the floor, she had to raise herself as slowly as she might. Soon their eyes arrived in the same plane, and whether a mutual glance of intelligence was exchanged, or whether their power of attraction overcame his power of resistance, it is not easy to determine, but certain it is that, following a primary natural law, Arthur gravitated towards her, and kissed her on the face.

"My!" exclaimed Pigott, and the milk-jug rolled unheeded on the floor.

"Hum! I suppose I had better explain," began he.

"I think you have spilt the milk," added she.

"That we have become engaged, and are——"

"All to pieces, I declare!" broke in Angela, with her head somewhere near the carpet.

And then they both laughed.

"Well, I never, no, not in all my born days! Sir and Miss Angela, all I have got to say about this extraordinary proceeding"—they glanced at each other in alarm—"is that I am very glad to hear on it, and I hope and pray how as you may be happy, and, if you treat my Angela right, you'll be just the happiest and luckiest man in the three kingdoms, including Ireland and the Royal Family, and, if you treat her wrong, worse will come to you; and her poor mother's last words, as I heard with my own ears, will come true to you, and serve you right—and there's all the milk upon the floor. And God bless you both, my dears, is the prayer of an old woman."

Here the worthy soul broke down, and began to cry, nor were Angela's eyes free from tears.

After this little episode, breakfast proceeded in something like the usual way. Church was at 10.30, and, a while before the hour, Arthur and Angela strolled down to the spot that had already become as holy ground to them, and looked into each other's eyes, and said again the same sweet words. Then they went on, and mingling with the little congregation—that did not number more than thirty souls—they passed into the cool quiet of the church.

"Lawks!" said a woman, as they went by, "ain't she just a beauty? What a pretty wedding they'd make!"

Arthur overheard it, and noted the woman, and afterwards found a pretext to give her five shillings because he said it was a lucky omen.

On the communion-table of the pretty little church there was spread the "fair white cloth" of the rubric. It was the day for the monthly celebration of the Sacrament, that met the religious requirements of the village.

"Will you stay to the Sacrament with me?" whispered Angela to her lover, in the interval between their seating themselves and the entry of the clergyman, Mr. Fraser's *locum tenens*.

Arthur nodded assent.

And so, when the time came, those two went up together to the altar-rails, and, kneeling side by side, ate of the bread and drank of the cup, and, rising, departed thence with a new link between them. For, be sure, part of the prayers which they offered up at that high moment were in humble petition to the Almighty to set His solemn seal and blessing on their love. Indeed, so far as Angela was concerned, there were few acts of her simple life that she did not consecrate by prayer; how much more, then, was she bent upon bringing this, the greatest of all her acts, before her Maker's throne!

Strange indeed, and full of a holy promise, is the yearning with which we turn to Heaven to seek sanctification of our deeds, feeling our weakness, and craving strength from the source of strength; a yearning of which the church, with that subtle knowledge of human nature, which is one of the mainsprings of its power, has not been slow to avail itself. And this need is more especially felt in matters connected with the noblest of the passions, perhaps because all true love and all true religion come from a common home.

Thus pledged to one another with a new and awful pledge, and knit together in the bonds of an universal love, embracing their poor affection as the wide skies embrace the earth, they rose, and went their ways, purer to worship, and stronger to endure.

That afternoon, Arthur had a conversation with his betrothed that, partaking of a business nature in the beginning, ended rather oddly.

"I must speak to your father when he comes back to-morrow, dear," he began.

"My father! Oh, yes, I had forgotten about that;" and she looked a little anxious.

"Fortunately, I am fairly well off; so I see no cause why he should object."

"Well, I think that he will be rather glad to get rid of Pigott and myself. You know that he is not very fond of me."

"That is strange want of taste on his part."

"Oh, I don't know. Everybody does not see me with your eyes, Arthur."

"Because they have not the chance. All the world would love you, if it knew you. But, seriously, I think that he can hardly object, or he would not have allowed us to be thrown so much together; for, in nine cases out of ten, that sort of thing has only one result."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that to import a young fellow into the house, and throw him solely into a daughter's company, is very apt to bring about—well, what has been brought about."

"Then you mean that you think that I should have fallen in love with any gentleman who had come here?"

Arthur, not seeing the slight flush of indignation in her eyes, replied—

"Well, you know, there is always a risk, but I should imagine that it would very much depend upon the gentleman."

"Arthur"—with a little stamp—"I am ashamed of you. How can you think such things of me? You must have a very poor opinion of me."

"My dear, why should I suppose myself superior to anybody else, that you should only fall in love with me? You set too high a value on me."

"And you set too low a value upon me; you do not understand me. You are my fate, my other self; how would it have been possible for me to love any one but you? I feel as though I had been travelling to meet you since the beginning of the world, to stand by your side till it crumbles away, yes, for eternity itself. Oh! Arthur, do not laugh at what I say. I am, indeed, only a simple girl, but, as I told you last night, there is something stirring in me now, my real life, my eternal part, something that you have awakened, and with which you have to deal, something apart from the *me* you see before you. As I speak, I feel, and know that when we are dead and gone, I shall love you still; when more ages have passed than there are leaves upon that tree, I shall love you still. Arthur, I am yours for ever, for the time that is, and is to be."

She spoke with the grand freedom of one inspired; nay, he felt that she was inspired, and the same feeling of awe that had come upon him when first he saw her face, again took possession of him. Taking her hand, he kissed it.

"Dearest," he said, "dearest Angela, who am I that you should love me so? What have I done that such a

treasure should be given to me? I hope that it may be as you say!"

"It will be as I say," she answered, as she bent to kiss him. And then they went on in silence.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE ARE TOO HAPPY.

PHILIP arrived home about one o'clock on the Monday, and, after their nursery dinner, Arthur made his way to the study, and was soon in the dread presence of the man whose daughter he was about to ask in marriage. For what presence is more dread; most people would rather face a chief-justice with the gout.

Philip, whom he found seated by a tray, the contents of which he seemed in no humour to touch, received him with his customary politeness, saying, with a smile, that he hoped he had not come to tell him that he was sick of the place and its inhabitants, and was going away.

"Far from it, Mr. Caresfoot. I come to speak to you on a very different subject."

Philip glanced up with a quick look of expectant curiosity, but said nothing.

"In short," said Arthur, desperately, "I come to ask you to sanction my engagement to Angela."

A pause—a very awkward pause—ensued.

"You are, then, engaged to my daughter?"

"Subject to your consent, I am."

Then came another pause.

"You will understand me, Heigham, when I say that you take me rather by surprise in this business. Your acquaintance with her has been short."

"That is very true, but I have seen a great deal of her."

"Perhaps; but she knows absolutely nothing of the world, and her preference for you—for, as you say you are engaged to her, I presume she has shown a preference—may be a mistake, merely a young girl's romantic idea."

Arthur thought of his conversation of the previous day with Angela, and could not help smiling as he answered—

"I think if you ask her, that she will tell you this is not the case."

"Heigham, I will be frank with you. I like you, and you have, I believe, sufficient means. Of course, you know that my daughter will have nothing—at any rate, till I am dead," he added quickly.

"I never thought about the matter, but I shall be only too glad to marry her with nothing but herself."

"Very good. I was going to say that, notwithstanding this, marriage is an important matter; and I must have time to think over it before I give you a decided answer, say a week. I shall not, however, expect you to leave here unless you wish to do so, nor shall I seek to place any restrictions on your intercourse with Angela, since it would appear that the mischief is already done. I am flattered by your proposal; but I must have time, and you must understand that in this instance hesitation does not necessarily mean consent."

In affairs of this nature a man is satisfied with small mercies, and willing to put up with inconveniences that appear trifling in comparison with the disasters which might have overtaken him. Arthur was no exception to the general rule. Indeed, he was profuse in his thanks, and, buoyed up with all the confidence of youth, felt sure

in his heart that he would soon find a way to extinguish such objections as might still linger in Philip's mind.

His prospective father-in-law contented himself with acknowledging his remarks with courtesy, and the interview came to an end.

Arthur gone, however, his host lost all his calmness of demeanour, and, rising from his untasted meal, paced up and down the room in thought. Everything, he reflected, had fallen out as he wished. Young Heigham wanted to marry his daughter, and he could not wish her a better husband. Save for the fatality which had sent that woman to him on her fiend's errand, he would have given his consent at once, and been glad to give it. Not that he meant to refuse it—he had no such idea. And then he began to think, supposing that Lady Bellamy's embassy had been of a nature that he could entertain, which it was not, what it would mean to him. It would mean the realisation of the work and aspirations of twenty years; it would mean his re-entry into the property and position from which, according to his own view, he had been unjustly ousted; it would mean, last but not least, triumph over George. And now chance, mighty chance —as fools call Providence—had at last thrown into his hands a lever with which it would be easy to topple over every stumbling-block that lay in his path to triumph; more, he might even be able to spoil that Egyptian George, giving him less than his due.

Oh, how he hungered for the broad acres of his birthright! longing for them as a lover longs for his lost bride. The opportunity would never come again; why should he throw it away? To do so would be to turn his cousin into an open and implacable foe. Why should he allow this girl, whose birth had bereft him of the

only creature he had ever loved, whose sex had alienated the family estates, and for whose company he cared nothing, to come as a destruction on his plans? She would be well off; the man loved her. As for her being engaged to this young Heigham, women soon got over those disappointments. After all, now that he came to think of the matter calmly, what valid cause was there why the thing should not be?

And as he paced to and fro, and thought thus, an answer came into his mind. For there rose up before him a vision of his dying wife, and there sounded in his ears the murmur of her half-forgotten voice, that, for all its broken softness, had, with its last accents, called down God's winged vengeance and His everlasting doom on him who would harm her unprotected child. And, feeling that if he did this thing, on him would be the vengeance and the doom, Philip thought of the shadows of the night, and grew afraid.

When Arthur and his host met, according to their custom, that evening, no allusion was made on either side to their conversation of the afternoon, nor did her father even speak a word to Angela on the subject. Life, to all appearance, went on in the old house precisely as though nothing had happened. Philip did not attempt to put the smallest restraint on Arthur and his daughter, and studiously shut his eyes to the somewhat obvious signs of their mutual affection. For them the long June days were golden, but all too short. Every morning found their mutual love more perfect, but when the flakes of crimson light faded from the skies, and night dropped her veil over the tall trees and peaceful lake, by some miracle it had grown deeper and more perfect still. Day by day, Arthur discovered new charms in Angela; here

some hidden knowledge, there an unsuspected grace, and everywhere an all-embracing charity and love. Day by day he gazed deeper into the depths of her mind, and still there were more to plumb. For it was a storehouse of noble thoughts and high ambitions—ambitions, many of which could only find fulfilment in another world than this. And, the more he saw of her, the prouder he was to think that such a perfect creature should so dearly love himself; and with the greater joy did he look forward to that supreme and happy hour when he should call her his. And so day added itself to day, and found them happy.

Indeed, the aspect of their fortunes seemed as smooth and smiling as the summer surface of the lake. About Philip's final consent to their engagement they did not trouble themselves, judging, not unnaturally, that his conduct was in itself a guarantee of approval. If he meant to raise any serious objections, he would surely have done so before, Arthur would urge, and Angela would quite agree with him, and wonder what parent could find it in his heart to object to her bonnie-eyed lover.

What a merciful provision of Providence it is that throws a veil over the future, only to be pierced by the keenest-eyed of spiritual Scotchmen! Where should we find a flavour in those unfrequent cups that the shyest of the gods, Joy, holds to our yearning lips, could we know of the bitter which lurks in the tinselled bowl? Surely we have much to be thankful for, but for nothing should we be so grateful as for this blessed impotence of foresight!

But, as it is often on the bluest days that the mercury begins to sink beneath the breath of far-off hurricane, so there is a warning spirit implanted in sensitive minds

which makes them mistrustful of too great happiness. We feel that, for most of us, the wheel of our fortunes revolves too quickly to allow of a long continuance of unbroken joy.

"Arthur," said Angela, one morning, when eight days had passed since her father's return from town, "we are too happy. We should throw something into the lake."

"I have not got a ring, except the one you gave me," he answered; for his signet was on her finger. "So, unless we sacrifice Aleck or the ravens, I don't know what it is to be."

"Don't joke, Arthur. I tell you we are too happy."

Could Arthur have seen through an acre or so of undergrowth as Angela uttered these words, he would have perceived a very smart page-boy with the Bellamy crest on his buttons delivering a letter to Philip. It is true that there was nothing particularly alarming about that, but its contents might have given a point to Angela's forebodings. It ran thus:

"Rewtham House, Monday.

"My dear Mr. Caresfoot,

"With reference to our conversation last week about your daughter and G., can you come over and have a quiet chat with me this afternoon?

"Sincerely yours,

"Anne Bellamy."

Philip read this note, and then re-read it, knowing in his heart that now was his opportunity to act up to his convictions, and put an end to the whole transaction in a few decisive words. But a man who has for so many years given place to the devil of avarice, even though it

be avarice with a legitimate object, cannot shake himself free from his clutches in a moment; even when, as in Philip's case, honour and right, to say nothing of a still more powerful factor, superstition, speak so loudly in his ears. Surely, he thought, there would be no harm in hearing what she had to say. He could explain his reasons for having nothing to do with the matter so much better in person. Such mental struggles have only one end. Presently the smart page-boy bore back this note:

"DEAR LADY BELLAMY,
"I will be with you at half-past three.
"P. C."

It was with very curious sensations that Philip that afternoon was shown into a richly furnished boudoir in Rewtham House. He had not been in that room since he had talked to Maria Lee there, sitting on the very sofa now occupied by Lady Bellamy's still beautiful form, and he could not but feel that it was a place of evil omen for him.

Lady Bellamy rose to greet him with her most fascinating smile.

"This is very kind," she said, as she motioned him to a seat, which Philip afterwards discovered had been carefully arranged so as to put his features in the full light, whilst, sitting on the sofa, her own were concealed. "Well, Mr. Caresfoot," she began, after a little pause, "I suppose I had better come to the point at once. First of all, I presume, as you anticipated would be the case, that there exists some sort of understanding between Mr. Heigham and your daughter."

Philip nodded.

"Well, your cousin is as determined as ever about the matter. Indeed, he is simply infatuated or bewitched, I really don't know which."

"I am sorry for it, Lady Bellamy, as I cannot——"

"One moment, Mr. Caresfoot; first, let me tell you his offer, then we can talk it over. He offers, conditionally on his marriage with your daughter, to sell you the Isleworth estates at a fair valuation hereafter to be agreed upon, and to make a large settlement."

"And what part does he wish me to play in the matter?"

"This. First, you must get rid of young Heigham, and prevent him from holding *any* communication, either with Angela herself, or with any other person connected with this place, for one year from the date of his departure. Secondly, you must throw no obstacle in George's path. Thirdly, if required, you must dismiss her old nurse, Pigott."

"It cannot be, Lady Bellamy. I came here to tell you so. I dare not force my daughter into such a marriage for all the estates in England."

Lady Bellamy laughed.

"It is amusing," she said, "to see a father afraid of his own daughter; but you are over-hasty, Mr. Caresfoot. Who asked you to force her? All you are asked to do is not to interfere, and leave the rest to myself and George. You will have nothing to do with it one way or the other, nor will any responsibility rest with you. Besides, it is very probable that your cousin will live down his fancy, or some other obstacle will arise to put an end to the thing, in which case Mr. Heigham will come back at the end of his year's probation, and events will take their natural course. It is only wise and right that you should

try the constancy of these young lovers, instead of allowing them to marry out of hand. If, on the other hand, Angela should in the course of the year declare a preference for her cousin, surely that will be no affair of yours."

"I don't understand what your interest is in this matter, Lady Bellamy."

"My dear Mr. Caresfoot, what does my interest matter to you? Perhaps I have one, perhaps I have not; all women love match-making, you know; what really is important is your decision," and she shot a glance at him from the heavy-lidded eyes, only to recognise that he was not convinced by her arguments, or, if convinced, obstinate. "By the way," she went on slowly, "George asked me to make a payment to you on his account, money that has, he says, been long owing, but which it has not hitherto been convenient to repay."

"What is the sum?" asked Philip, abstractedly.

"A large one; a thousand pounds."

It did not require the peculiar intonation she threw into her voice to make the matter clear to him. He was well aware that no sum was owing.

"Here is the cheque," she went on; and, taking from her purse a signed and crossed cheque upon a London banker, she unfolded it and threw it upon the table, watching him the while.

Philip gazed at the money with the eyes of a hungry wolf. A thousand pounds! That might be his for the asking, nay, for the taking. It would bind him to nothing. The miser's greed took possession of him as he looked. Slowly he raised his hand, twitching with excitement, and stretched it out towards the cheque, but, before his fingers touched it, Lady Bellamy, as though by

accident, dropped her white palm upon the precious paper.

"I suppose that Mr. Heigham will leave to-morrow on the understanding we mentioned?" she said, carelessly, but in a significant tone.

Philip nodded.

The hand was withdrawn as carelessly as it had come, leaving the pink cheque, blushing in all its naked beauty, upon the table. Philip took it as deliberately as he could, and put it in his pocket. Then, rising, he said good-bye, adding, as he passed through the door:—

"Remember, I have no responsibility in the matter. I wash my hands of it, and wish to hear nothing about it."

"The thousand pounds has done it," reflected Lady Bellamy. "I told George that he would rise greedily at money. I have not watched him for twenty years for nothing. Fancy selling an only daughter's happiness in life for a thousand pounds, and such a daughter too! I wonder how much he would take to murder her, if he were certain that he would not be found out. Upon my word, my work grows quite interesting. That cur, Philip, is as good as a play," and she laughed her own peculiar laugh.

CHAPTER XV.

ARTHUR'S PROMISE.

INTO Philip's guilty thoughts, as he wended his homeward way, we will not inquire, and indeed, for all the warm glow that the thousand pound cheque in his pocket diffused through his system, they were not to be envied. Perhaps no scoundrel presents at heart such a miserable object to himself and all who know him, as the scoundrel who attempts to deceive himself, and, whilst reaping its

profits, tries to shoulder the responsibility of iniquity on to the backs of others!

Unfortunately, in this prosaic world of bargains, one cannot receive cheques for one thousand pounds without, in some shape or form, giving a *quid pro quo*. Now Philip's *quid* was to rid his house and the neighbourhood of Arthur Heigham, his guest and his daughter's lover. It was not a task he liked, but the unearned increment in his breeches pocket continually reminded him of the obligation it entailed.

When Arthur came to smoke his pipe with his host that evening, the latter looked so gloomy and depressed, that he wondered to himself if he was going to be treated to a repetition of the shadow scene, little guessing that there was something much more personally unpleasant before him.

"Heigham," Philip said, suddenly, and looking studiously in the other direction, "I want to speak to you. I have been thinking over our conversation of about a week ago on the subject of your engagement to Angela, and have now come to a final determination. I may say at once that I approve of you in every way" (here his hearer's heart bounded with delight), "but, under all the circumstances, I don't think that I should be right in sanctioning an immediate engagement. You are not sufficiently sure of each other for that. I may seem old-fashioned, but I am a great believer in the virtue of constancy, and I'm anxious, in your own interests, to put yours and Angela's to the test. The terms that I can offer you are these. You must leave here to-morrow, and must give me your word of honour as a gentleman —which I know will be the most effectual guarantee that I can take from you—that you will not for the space of

a year either attempt to see Angela again, or to hold any written communication with her, or anybody in any way connected with her. The year ended, you can return, and, should you both still be of the same mind, you can then marry her as soon as you like. If you decline to accede to these terms—which I believe to be to your mutual ultimate advantage—I must refuse my consent to the engagement altogether."

A silence followed this speech. The match that Arthur had lit before Philip began, burnt itself out between his fingers without his appearing to suffer any particular inconvenience, and now his pipe fell with a crash into the grate, and broke into fragments—a fit symbol of the blow dealt to his hopes. For some moments he was so completely overwhelmed at the idea of losing Angela for a whole long year, losing her as completely as though she were dead, that he could not answer. At length he found his voice, and said, hoarsely—

"Yours are hard terms."

"I cannot argue the point with you, Heigham; such as they are, they are my terms, founded on what I consider I owe to my daughter. Do you accept them?"

"I cannot answer you off-hand. My happiness and Angela's are too vitally concerned to allow me to do so. I must consult her first."

"Very good, I have no objection; but you must let me have your answer by ten to-morrow."

Had Arthur only known his own strength and Philip's weakness—the strength that honesty and honour ever have in the face of dishonour and dishonesty—had he known the hesitating feebleness of Philip's avarice-tossed mind, how easy it would have been for him to tear his bald arguments to shreds, and, by the bare exhibition of

unshaken purpose, to confound and disallow his determinations—had he then and there refused to agree to his ultimatum, so divided was Philip in his mind and so shaken by superstitious fears, that he would have accepted it as an omen, and have yielded to a decision of character that had no real existence in himself. But Arthur did not know; indeed, how could he know? and he was, besides, too thorough a gentleman to allow himself to suspect foul play. And so, too sad for talk, and oppressed by the dread sense of coming separation from her whom he loved more dearly than his life, he sought his room, there to think and pace, to pace and think, until the stars had set.

When, wearied out at length, he threw himself into bed, it was only to exchange bad for worse; for on such occasions sleep is worse than wakefulness, it is so full of dreams, big with coming pain. Shortly after dawn he got up again, and went into the garden and listened to the birds singing their matin hymn. But he was in no mood for the songs of birds, however sweet, and it was a positive relief to him when old Jakes emerged, his cross face set in the gladness of the morning, like a sullen cloud in the blue sky, and began to do something to his favourite bed of cabbages. Not that Arthur was fond of old Jakes; on the contrary, ever since the coffin-stool conversation, which betrayed, he considered, a malevolent mind, he detested him personally; but still he set a fancy value on him because he was connected with the daily life of his betrothed.

And then at last out came Angela, having spied him from behind the curtains of her window, clothed in the same white gown in which he had first beheld her, and which he consequently considered the prettiest of frocks.

Never did she look more lovely than when she came walking towards him that morning, with her light, proud step, which was so full of grace and womanly dignity. Never had he thought her more sweet and heart-compelling, than when, having first made sure that Jakes had retreated to feed his pigs, she shyly lifted her bright face to be greeted with his kiss. But she was quick of sympathy, and had learned to read him like an open page, and before his lips had fairly fallen on her own she knew that things had gone amiss.

"Oh, what is it, Arthur?" she said, with a little pant of fear.

"Be brave, dear, and I will tell you." And, in somewhat hesitating tones, he recounted word for word what had passed between her father and himself.

She listened in perfect silence, and bore the blow as a brave woman should. When he had finished, she said, with a little tremor in her voice—

"You will not forget me in a year, will you, Arthur?"

He kissed her by way of answer, and then they agreed to go together to Philip, and try to turn him from his purpose.

Breakfast was not a cheerful meal that day, and Pigott, noticing the prevailing depression, remarked, with sarcasm, that they might, for all appearance to the contrary, have been married for twenty years; but even this spirited sally did not provoke a laugh. Ten o'clock, the hour that was to decide their fate, came all too soon, and it was with very anxious hearts that they took their way to the study. Philip, who was seated in readiness, appeared to view Angela's arrival with some uneasiness.

"Of course, Angela," he said. "I am always glad to see you, but I hardly expected——"

"I beg your pardon for intruding, father," she answered; "but, as this is very important to me, I thought that I had better come too, and hear what is settled."

As it was evident that she meant to stay, Philip did not attempt to gainsay her.

"Oh, very well, very well—I suppose you have heard the terms upon which I am prepared to consent to your engagement."

"Yes, Arthur has told me; and it is to implore you to modify them that we have come. Father, they are cruel terms—to be dead to each other for a whole long year."

"I cannot help it, Angela. I am sorry to inflict pain upon either of you; but I have arrived at them entirely in your own interests, and after a great deal of anxious thought. Believe me, a year's probation will be very good for both of you; it is not probable that, where my only child is concerned, I should wish to do anything except what is for her happiness!"

Arthur looked rebellion at Angela. Philip saw it, and added—

"Of course you can defy me—it is, I believe, rather the fashion for girls, nowadays, to do so—but, if you do, you must both clearly understand, first, that you cannot marry without my consent till the first of May next, or very nearly a year hence, when Angela comes of age, and that I shall equally forbid all intercourse in the interval; and secondly, that when you do so, it will be against my wish, and that I shall cut her name out of my will, for this property is only entailed in the male line. It now only remains for me to ask you if you agree to my conditions."

Angela answered him, speaking very slowly and clearly—

"I accept them on my own behalf, not because I understand them, or think them right, or because of your threats, but because, though you do not care for me, I am your daughter, and should obey you—and believe that you wish to do what is best for me. That is why I accept, although it will make my life wretched for a year."

"You hear what she says?" said Philip, turning to Arthur. "Do you also agree?"

He answered boldly, and with some temper (how would he have answered could he have seen the thousand pound cheque that was reposing upon the table in Philip's rusty pocket-book, and known for what purpose it came there?).

"If it had not been Angela's wish, I would never have agreed. I think your terms preposterous, and I only hope that you have some satisfactory reason for them; for you have not shown us any. But since she takes this view of the matter, and because, so far as I can see, you have completely cornered us, I suppose I must. You are her father, and cannot in nature wish to thwart her happiness; and if you have any plan of causing her to forget me—I don't want to be conceited, but I believe that it will fail." Here Angela smiled somewhat sadly. "So, unless one of us dies before the year is up, I shall come back to be married on the 9th of June next year."

"Really, my dear Heigham, your way of talking is so aggressive, that some fathers might be tempted to ask you not to come back at all; but perhaps it is, under the circumstances, excusable."

"You would probably think so, if you were in my place," blurted out Arthur.

"You give me, then, your word of honour as a gentleman that you will attempt, either in person or by letter,

no communication with Angela or with anybody about this place for one year from to-day?"

"On the condition that, at the end of the year, I may return and marry her as soon as I like."

"Certainly; your marriage can take place on the 9th of June next, if you like, and care to bring a licence and a proper settlement—say, of half your income—with you," answered Philip, with a half-smile.

"I take you at your word," said Arthur, eagerly, "that is, if Angela agrees." Angela made no signs of disagreement. "Then, on those terms, I give you my promise."

"Very good. Then that is settled, and I will send for a dog-cart to take you to the four o'clock train. I fear you will hardly be ready for the 12.25. I shall, however, hope," he added, "to have the pleasure of presenting this young lady to you for good and all on this day next year. Good-bye for the present. I shall see you before you go."

It is painful to have to record that when Arthur got outside the door, and out of Angela's hearing, he cursed Philip, in his grief and anger, for the space of some minutes.

To linger over those last hours could only be distressing to the sympathetic reader of this history, more especially if he, or she, has ever had the misfortune to pass through such a time in their own proper persons. The day of any one's departure is always wretched, but much more is it wretched when the person departing is a lover, whose face will not be seen and of whom no postman will bear tidings for a whole long year.

Some comfort, however, these two took in looking forward to that joyous day when the year of probation

should have been gathered to its predecessors, and in making the most minute arrangements for their wedding: how Angela was to warn Mr. Fraser that his services would be required; where they should go to for their honeymoon, and even of what flowers the wedding bouquet, which Arthur was to bring down from town with him, should be composed.

And thus the hours passed away, all too quickly, and each of them strove to be merry, in order to keep up the spirits of the other. But it is not in human nature to feel cheerful with a lump of ice upon the heart! Dinner was even more dismal than breakfast, and Pigott, who had been informed of the impending misfortune, and who was distrustful of Philip's motives, though she did not like to add to the general gloom by saying so, made, after the manner of half-educated people, a painful and infectious exhibition of her grief.

"Poor Aleck!" said Angela, when the time drew near, bending down over the dog to hide a tear, as she had once before bent down to hide a blush; "poor Aleck! I shall miss you almost as much as your master."

"You will not miss him, Angela, because I am going to make you a present of him if you will keep him."

"That is very good of you, dear. I shall be glad to have him for your sake."

"Well, keep him, love, he is a good dog; he will quite have transferred his allegiance by the time I come back. I hope you won't have done the same, Angela."

"Oh, Arthur, why will you so often make me angry by saying such things? The sun will forget to shine before I forget you."

"Hush, love, I did not mean it," and he took her in his arms. And so they sat there together under the oak

where first they had met, hand in hand and heart to heart, and it was at this moment that the self-reliant strength, and more beautiful serenity of Angela's character as compared with her lover's came into visible play. For whilst, as the moment of separation drew nigh, he could scarcely contain his grief, she on the other hand grew more and more calm, strengthening his weakness with her quiet power; and bidding him seek consolation in his trouble at the hands of Him who for His own purposes decreed it.

"Dearest," she said, in answer to his complainings, "there are so many things in the world that we cannot understand, and yet they must be right and lead to a good end. What may happen to us before this year is out, of course we cannot say, but I feel that all love is immortal, and that there is a perfect life awaiting us, if not in this world, then in the next. Remember, dear, that these few years are, after all, but as a breath to the general air, or as that dew-drop to the waters of the lake, when compared with the future that awaits us there, and that until we attain that future we cannot really know each other, or the true meaning and purpose of our love. So look forward to it without fear, dear heart, and if it should chance that I should pass out of your life, or that other ties should spring up round you which shall forbid the outward expression of our love——" Here Arthur started and was about to interrupt, but she stopped him. "Do not start, Arthur. Who can read the furture? Stranger things have happened, and if, I say, such a thing should come about in our case, then remember, I implore you, that in the future lies the answer to the puzzles of the world, and turn your eyes to it, as to the horizon beyond which you will find me waiting

for you, and not only me, but all that you have ever loved. Only, dear, try to be a good man and love me always."

He looked at her in wonder.

"Angela," he said, "what has made you so different from other women? With all whom I have known, love is an affair of passion or amusement, of the world and the day, but yours gazes towards Heaven, and looks to find its real utterance in the stillness of Eternity! To be loved by you, my dear, would be worth a century of sorrows."

At last the moment came, as all moments good and bad must come. To Pigott, who was crying, Arthur gave a hug and a five-pound note, to Aleck, a pat on the head, to Philip, who could not look him in the face, a shake of the hand, and to Angela, who bravely smiled into his eyes—a long last kiss.

But, when the cruel wheels began to crunch upon the gravel, the great tears welling to her eyes blotted him from sight. Blindly she made her way up to her room, and throwing herself upon the bed let her unrestrained sorrow loose, feeling that she was indeed desolate and alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

MILDRED CARR.

WHEN Angela was still quite a child, the permanent inhabitants of Sherborne Lane, King William Street, in the city of London, used to note a very pretty girl, of small stature and modest ways, passing out—every evening after the city gentlemen had locked up their offices and gone home—from the quiet of the lane into the roar and rush of the city. This young girl was Mildred James, the only daughter of a struggling, a very struggling, city doctor, and her daily mission was to go to the cheap markets and buy the provisions that were to last the Sherborne Lane household (for her father lived in the same rooms that he practised in) for the ensuing twenty-four hours. The world was a hard place for poor Mildred in those days of provision hunting, when so little money had to pay for so many necessaries, and to provide also for the luxuries that were necessaries to her invalid mother. Some years later, when she was a sweet maiden of eighteen, her mother died, but medical competition was keen in Sherborne Lane, and her removal did not greatly alleviate the pressure of poverty. At last, one evening, when she was about twenty years of age, a certain Mr. Carr, an old gentleman with whom her father had some acquaintance, sent up a card with a pencilled message on it to the effect that he would be glad to see Dr. James.

"Run, Mildred," said her father, "and tell Mr. Carr that I will be with him in a minute. It will never do to see a new patient in this coat."

Mildred departed, and, gliding into the gloomy con-

sulting-room like a sunbeam, delivered her message to the old gentleman, who appeared to be in some pain, and prepared to return.

"Don't go away," almost shouted the aged patient; "I have crushed my finger in a door, and it hurts most confoundedly. You are something to look at in this hole, you distract my attention."

Mildred thought to herself that this was an odd way of paying a compliment, if it was meant for one; but then, old gentlemen with crushed fingers are not given to weighing their words.

"Are you Dr. James' daughter?" he asked, presently.

"Yes, sir."

"Ugh, I have lived most of my life in Sherborne Lane, and never saw anything half so pretty in it before. Damn this finger!"

At this moment the doctor himself arrived, and wanted to dismiss Mildred, but Mr. Carr, who was a headstrong old gentleman, vowed that no one else should hold his injured hand whilst it was dressed, and so she stayed just long enough for him to fall as completely in love with her shell-like face, as though he had been twenty instead of nearly seventy.

Now, Mr. Carr was not remarkable for good looks, and, in addition to having seen out so many summers, had also buried two wives. It will, therefore, be clear that he was scarcely the suitor that a lovely girl, conscious of capacities for deep affection, would have selected of her own free will; but, on the other hand, he was honest and kind-hearted, and what was more to the point, perhaps the wealthiest wine-merchant in the city. Mildred resisted as long as she could, but want is a hard master, and a father's arguments are difficult to answer, and in

the end she married him, and, what is more, made him a good and faithful wife.

She never had any cause to regret it, for he was kindness itself towards her, and when he died, some five years afterwards, having no children of his own, he left her sole legatee of all his enormous fortune, bound up by no restrictions as to re-marriage. About this time also her father died, and Mildred was left as much alone in the world as it is possible for a young and pretty woman to be, possessing in her own right between twenty and thirty thousand a year.

Needless to say, Mrs. Carr was thenceforth one of the catches of her generation; but nobody could catch her, though she alone knew how many had tried. Once she made a list of all the people who had proposed to her; it included amongst others a bishop, two peers, three members of parliament, no less than five army officers, an American, and a dissenting clergyman.

"It is perfectly marvellous, my dear," she said to her companion, Agatha Terry, "how fond people are of twenty thousand a year, and yet they all said that they loved me for myself, that is, all except the dissenter, who wanted me to help to 'feed his flock,' and I liked him the best of the lot, because he was the honestest."

Mrs. Carr had a beautiful house in Grosvenor Square, a place in Leicestershire, where she hunted a little, a place in the Isle of Wight that she rarely visited, and, lastly, a place at Madeira where she lived for nearly half the year. There never had been a breath of scandal against her name, nor had she given cause for any. "As for loving," she would say, "the only things she loved were beetles and mummies," for she was a clever naturalist, and a faithful student of the lore of the ancient

Egyptians. The beetles, she would explain, had been the connecting link between the two sciences, since beetles had led her to scarabæi, and scarabæi to the human husks with which they are to be found; but this statement, though amusing, was not strictly accurate, as she had in reality contracted the taste from her late husband, who had left her a large collection of Egyptian antiquities.

"I do adore a mummy," she would say, "I am small enough in mind and body already, but it makes me feel inches smaller, and I like to measure my own diminutiveness."

She was not much of a reader; life, she declared, was too short to waste in study; but, when she did take up a book, it was generally of a nature that most women of her class would have called stiff, and then she could read it without going to sleep.

In addition to these occupations, Mrs. Carr had had various crazes at different stages in her widowhood, which had now endured for some five years. She had travelled, she had "gone-in for art;" once she had speculated a little, but finding that, for a woman, it was a losing game, she was too shrewd to continue this last pastime. But she always came back to her beetles and her mummies.

Still, with all her money, her places, her offers of marriage, and her self-made occupations, Mildred Carr was essentially "a weary woman, sunk deep in ease, and sated with her life." Within that little frame of hers, there beat a great active heart, ever urging her onwards towards an unknown end. She would describe herself as an "ill-regulated woman," and the description was not without justice, for she did not possess that placid, even mind which is so necessary to the comfort of English ladies, and which enables many of them to bury a hus-

band or a lover as composedly as they take him. She would have given worlds to be able to fall in love with some one, to fill up the daily emptiness of her existence with another's joys and griefs, but she *could* not. Men passed before her in endless procession, all sorts and conditions of them, and for the most part they were anxious to marry her, but they might as well have been a string of wax dolls for aught she could care about them. To her eyes, they were nothing more than a succession of frock-coats and tall hats, full of shine and emptiness, signifying nothing. For their opinion, too, and that of the society which they helped to form, she had a most complete and wrong-headed contempt. She cared nothing for the ordinary laws of social life, and was prepared to break through them on emergency, as a wasp breaks through a spider's web. Perhaps she guessed that a good deal of breaking would be forgiven to the owner of such a lovely face, and more than twenty thousand a year. With all this, she was extremely observant, and possessed, unknown to herself, considerable powers of mind, and great, though dormant, capacities for passion. In short, this little woman, with the baby face, smiling and serene as the blue sky that hides the gathering hurricane, was rather odder than the majority of her sex, which is perhaps saying a great deal.

One day, about a week before Arthur departed from the Abbey House, Agatha Terry was sitting in the blue drawing-room in the mansion in Grosvenor Square, when Mrs. Carr came in, almost at a run, slammed the door behind her, and plumped herself down in a chair with a sigh of relief.

"Agatha, give orders to pack up. We will go to Madeira by the next boat."

"Goodness gracious, Mildred! across that dreadful bay again; and just think how hot it will be, and the beginning of the season too."

"Now, Agatha, I'm going, and there's an end of it, so it is no use arguing. You can stay here, and give a series of balls and dinners, if you like."

"Nonsense, dear; I give parties indeed, and you at Madeira! Why, it's just as though you asked Ruth to entertain the reapers without Naomi. I'll go and give the orders; but I do hope that it will be calm. Why do you want to go now?"

"I'll tell you. Lord Minster has been proposing to me again, and announces his intention of going on doing so till I accept him. You know, he has just got into the Cabinet, so he has celebrated the event by asking me to marry him, for the third time."

"Poor fellow! Perhaps he is very fond of you?"

"Not a bit of it. He is fond of my good looks and my money. I will tell you the substance of his speech this morning. He stood like this, with his hands in his pockets, and said, 'I am now a cabinet minister. It is a good thing that a cabinet minister should have somebody presentable to sit at the head of his table. You are presentable. I appreciate beauty, when I have time to think about it. I observe that you are beautiful. I I am not very well-off for my position. You, on the other hand, are immensely rich. With your money, I can, in time, become Prime Minister. It is, consequently, evidently to my advantage that you should marry me, and I have sacrificed a very important appointment in order to come and settle it.'"

Agatha laughed.

"And how did you answer him?"

"In his own style. 'Lord Minster,' I said, 'I am, for the third time, honoured by your flattering proposal, but I have no wish to ornament your table, no desire to expose my beauty to your perpetual admiration, and no ambition to advance your political career. I do not love you, and I had rather become the wife of a crossing sweeper whom I loved, than that of a member of the government for whom I have *every* respect, but no affection.'

"'As the wife of a crossing-sweeper, it is probable,' he answered, 'that you would be miserable. As my wife, you would certainly be admired and powerful, and consequently happy.'

"'Lord Minster,' I said, 'you have studied human nature but very superficially, if you have not learnt that it is better for a woman to be miserable with the man she loves, than "admired, powerful, and consequently happy," with one who has no attraction for her.'

"'Your remark is interesting,' he replied; 'but I think that there is something paradoxical about it. I must be going now, as I have only five minutes to get to Westminster; but I will think it over, and answer it when we renew our conversation, which I propose to do very shortly;' and he was gone before I could get in another word."

"But why should that make you go to Madeira?"

"Because, my dear, if I don't, so sure as I am a living woman that man will tire me out and marry me, and I dislike him, and don't want to marry him. I have a strong will, but his is of iron."

And so it came to pass that the names of Mrs. Carr, Miss Terry, and three servants, appeared upon the passenger list of Messrs. Donald Currie & Co.'s royal mail

steamship *Warwick Castle,* due to sail for Madeira and the Cape ports on the 14th of June.

CHAPTER XVII.

R.M.S. "WARWICK CASTLE."

ARTHUR arrived in town in a melancholy condition. His was a temperament peculiarly liable to suffer from attacks of depression, and he had, with some excuse, a sufficiently severe one on him now. Do what he would, he could not for a single hour free his mind from the sick longing to see or hear from Angela, that, in addition to the mental distress it occasioned him, amounted almost to a physical pain. After two or three days of lounging about his club—for he was in no mood for going out—he began to feel that this sort of thing was intolerable, and that it was absolutely necessary for him to go somewhere or do something.

It so happened that, just after he had come to this decision, he overheard two men, who were sitting at the next table to him in the club dining-room, talking of the island of Madeira, and speaking of it as a charming place. He accepted this as an omen, and determined that to Madeira he would go. And, indeed, the place would suit him as well as any other to get through a portion of his year of probation in, and, whilst affording a complete change of scene, would not be too far from England.

And so it came to pass that on the morrow Arthur found himself in the office of Messrs. Donald Currie, for the purpose of booking his berth in the vessel that was due to sail on the 14th. There he was informed by the very affable clerk, who assisted him to choose his cabin,

that the vessel was unusually empty, and that, up to the present time, berths had been taken for only five ladies, and two of them Jewesses.

"However," the clerk added, by way of consolation, "this one," pointing to Mrs. Carr's name on the list, "is as good as a cargo," and he whistled expressively.

"What do you mean?" asked Arthur, his curiosity slightly excited.

"I mean—my word, here she comes."

At that moment the swing doors of the office were pushed open, and there came through them one of the sweetest, daintiest little women Arthur had ever seen. She was no longer quite young, she might be eight and twenty or thirty; but, on the other hand, maturity had but added to the charms of youth. She had big, brown eyes, which Arthur thought could probably look languishing, if they chose, and that even in repose were full of expression, a face soft and blooming as a peach, and round as a baby's, surmounted by a quantity of nut-brown hair, the very sweetest mouth, the lips rather full, and just showing a line of white, and lastly, what looked rather odd on such an infantile countenance, a firm, square, and very determined, if very diminutive chin. For the rest, it was difficult to say which was the most perfect, her figure or her dress.

All of which, of course, had little interest for Arthur, but what did rather startle him was her voice, when she spoke. From such a woman one would naturally have expected a voice of a corresponding nature, namely, one of the soft and murmuring order. But hers, on the contrary, though sweet, was decided, and clear as a bell, and with a particular ring in it that he would have recognised amongst a thousand others.

On her entrance, Arthur stepped on one side.

"I have come to say," she said, with a slight bow of recognition to the clerk, "that I have changed my mind about my berth; instead of the starboard deck cabin, I should like to have the port. I think that it will be cooler at this time of year, and also will you please make arrangements for three horses."

"I am excessively sorry, Mrs. Carr," the clerk answered; "but the port cabin is engaged—in fact, this gentleman has just taken it."

"Oh, in that case"—with a little blush—"there is an end of the question."

"By no means," interrupted Arthur. "It is a matter of perfect indifference to me where I go. I beg that you will take it."

"Oh, thank you. You are very good, but I could not think of robbing you of your cabin."

"I must implore you to do so. Rather than there should be any difficulty, I will go below." And then, addressing the clerk, "Be so kind as to change the cabins."

"I owe you many thanks for your courtesy," said Mrs. Carr, with a little curtsey.

Arthur took off his hat.

"Then we will consider that settled. Good-morning, or perhaps I should say *au revoir;*" and, bowing again, he left the office.

"What is that gentleman's name?" Mrs. Carr asked, when he was gone.

"Here it is, madam, on the list. 'Arthur Preston Heigham, passenger to Madeira.'"

"Arthur Preston Heigham!" Mrs. Carr said to herself, as she made her way down to her carriage in Fen-

church Street. "Arthur is pretty, and Preston is pretty, but I don't much like Heigham. At any rate, there is no doubt about his being a gentleman. I wonder what he is going to Madeira for? He has an interesting face. I think I am glad we are going to be fellow-passengers."

The two days that remained to him in town, Arthur spent in making his preparations for departure; getting money, buying, after the manner of young Englishmen starting on a voyage to foreign parts, a large and fearfully sharp hunting-knife, as though Madeira were the home of wild beasts, and laying in a stock of various other articles of a useless description, such as impenetrable sun-helmets and leather coats.

The vessel was to sail at noon on Friday, and on the Thursday evening he left Paddington by the mail that reaches Dartmouth about midnight. On the pier, he and one or two other fellow-passengers found a boat waiting to take them to the great vessel, that, painted a dull grey, lay still and solemn in the harbour as they were rowed up to her, very different from the active, living thing that she was destined to become within the next twenty-four hours. The tide ebbing past her iron sides, the fresh, strong smell of the sea, the tall masts pointing skywards like gigantic fingers, the chime of the bell upon the bridge, the sleepy steward, and the stuffy cabin, were all a pleasant variation from the every-day monotony of existence, and contributed towards the conclusion that life was still partially worth living, even when it could not be lived with Angela. Indeed, so much are we the creatures of circumstance, and so liable to be influenced by surroundings, that Arthur, who, a few hours before, had been plunged into the depths of depression,

turned into his narrow berth, after a tremendous struggle with the sheets—which stewards arrange on a principle incomprehensible to landlubbers, and probably only partially understood by themselves—with considerable satisfaction and a pleasurable sense of excitement.

The next morning, or rather the earlier part of it, when he was not thinking about Angela, he devoted to arranging his goods and chattels in his small domain, to examining the lovely scenery of Dartmouth harbour—the sight of which is enough to make any outward-bound individual bitterly regret his determination to quit his native land—and to inspecting the outward man of his fellow-passengers with that icy stolidity which characterises the true-born Briton. But the great event of the morning was the arrival of the mail train, bringing the bags destined for various African ports, loose letters for the passengers, and a motley contingent of the passengers themselves. Amongst these latter, he had no difficulty in recognising the two Jewesses, of whom the clerk in the office had spoken, who were accompanied by individuals, presumably their husbands, and very remarkable for the splendour of their diamond studs and the dirtiness of their nails. The only other specimen of saloon-passenger womankind that he could see was a pretty, black-eyed girl of about eighteen, who was, as he afterwards discovered, going out under the captain's care to be a governess at the Cape, and who, to judge from the intense melancholy of her countenance, did not particularly enjoy the prospect. But, with the exception of some heavy baggage that was being worked up from a cargo-boat by the donkey-engine, and a luxurious cane-chair on the deck that bore her name, no signs were there of Mrs. Carr.

Presently the purser sent round the head-steward, a gentleman whom Arthur mistook for the first mate, so smart was his uniform, to collect the letters, and it wrung him not a little to think that he alone could send none. The bell sounded to warn all not sailing to hurry to their boats, but still there was nothing to be seen of his acquaintance of the office; and, to speak the truth, he was just a little disappointed, for what he had seen of her had piqued his curiosity, and made him anxious to see more.

"I can't wait any longer," he heard the captain say; "she must come on by the *Kinfauns*."

It was full twelve o'clock, and the last rope was being loosed from the moorings. "Ting-ting," went the engine-room bell. "Thud-thud," started the great screw that would not stop again for so many restless hours. The huge vessel shuddered throughout her frame like an awakening sleeper, and, growing quick with life, forged an inch or two a-head. Next, a quartermaster came with two men to hoist up the gangway, when suddenly a boat shot alongside and hooked on, amongst the occupants of which Arthur had no difficulty in recognising Mrs. Carr, who sat laughing, like Pleasure, at the helm. The other occupants of the boat, who were not laughing, he guessed to be her servants and the lady who figured on the passenger-list as Miss Terry, a stout, solemn-looking person in spectacles.

"Now, then, Agatha," called out Mrs. Carr from the stern-sheets, "be quick and jump up."

"My dear Mildred, I can't go up there; I can't indeed. Why, the thing's moving."

"But you must go up, or else be pulled up with a rope. Here, I will show the way," and, moving down

the boat, she sprang boldly, as it rose with the swell, into the stalwart arms of the sailor who was waiting on the gangway landing-stage, and thence ran up the steps to the deck.

"Very well, I am going to Madeira. I don't know what you are going to do; but you must make up your mind quick."

"Can't hold on much longer, mum," said the boatman, "she's getting way on now."

"Come on, mum; I won't let you in," said the man of the ladder, seductively.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do?" groaned Miss Terry, wringing the hand that was not employed in holding on.

"John," called Mrs. Carr to a servant who was behind Miss Terry, and who looked considerably alarmed, "don't stand there like a fool; put Miss Terry on to that ladder."

Mrs. Carr was evidently accustomed to be obeyed, for, thus admonished, John seized the struggling and shrieking Miss Terry, and bore her to the edge of the boat, where she was caught by two sailors, and amidst the cheers of excited passengers, fairly dragged on to the deck.

"Oh! Mrs. Carr," said the chief officer, reproachfully, when Miss Terry had been satisfactorily deposited on a bench, "you are late again; you were late last voyage."

"Not at all, Mr. Thompson. I hate spending longer than is necessary aboard ship, so, when the train got in, I took a boat and went for a row in the harbour. I knew that you would not go without me."

"Oh, yes, we should, Mrs. Carr; the skipper heard about it because he waited for you before."

"Well, here I am, and I promise that I won't do it again."

Mr. Thompson laughed, and passed on. At this moment Mrs. Carr perceived Arthur, and, bowing to him, they fell into conversation about the scenery through which the boat was passing on her way to the open sea. Before very long, indeed, as soon as the vessel began to rise and fall upon the swell, this talk was interrupted by a voice from the seat where Miss Terry had been placed.

"Mildred," it said, "I do wish you would not come to sea; I am beginning to feel ill."

"And no wonder, if you will persist in coming up ladders head downwards. Where's John? He will help you to your cabin; the deck one, next to mine."

But John had vanished with a parcel.

"Mildred, send some one quick, I beg of you," remarked Miss Terry, in the solemn tone of one who feels that a crisis is approaching.

"I can't see anybody except a very dirty sailor."

"Permit me," said Arthur, stepping to the rescue.

"You are very kind; but she can't walk. I know her ways; she has got to the stage when she must be carried. Can you manage her?"

"I think so," replied Arthur, "if you don't mind holding her legs, and provided that the vessel does not roll," and, with an effort, he hoisted Miss Terry baby-fashion into his arms, and staggered off with her towards the indicated cabin, Mrs. Carr, as suggested, holding the lower limbs of the prostrate lady. Presently she began to laugh.

"If you only knew how absurd we look," she said.

"Don't make me laugh," answered Arthur, puffing, for Miss Terry was by no means light, "or I shall drop her."

"If you do, young man," ejaculated his apparently unconscious burden, with wonderful energy, "I will never forgive you."

A remark, the suddenness of which so startled him, that he very nearly did.

"Thank you. Now lay her quite flat, please. She won't get up again till we drop anchor at Madeira."

"If I live so long," murmured the invalid.

Arthur now made his bow and departed, wondering how two women so dissimilar as Mrs. Carr and Miss Terry came to be living together. As it is a piece of curiosity that the reader may share, perhaps it had better be explained.

Miss Terry was a middle-aged relative of Mrs. Carr's late husband, who had by a series of misfortunes been left quite destitute. Her distress having come to the knowledge of Mildred Carr, with the kind-hearted promptitude that distinguished her, she at once came to her aid, paid her debts, and brought her to her own house to stay, where she had remained ever since under the title of companion. These two women, living thus together, had nothing whatsoever in common, save that Miss Terry took some reflected interest in beetles. As for travelling, having been brought up and lived in the same house of the same county town until she reached the age of forty-five, it was, as may be imagined, altogether obnoxious to her. Indeed, it is more than doubtful if she retained any clear impression whatsoever of the places she visited. "A set of foreign holes!" as she would call them, contemptuously. Miss Terry was, in short, neither clever nor strong-minded, but so long as she could be in the company of her beloved Mildred, whom she regarded with mingled reverence and affection,

she was perfectly happy. Oddly enough, this affection was reciprocated, and there probably was nobody in the world for whom Mrs. Carr cared so much as her cousin by marriage, Agatha Terry. And yet it would be impossible to imagine two women more dissimilar.

Not long after they had left Dartmouth, the afternoon set in dull, and towards evening the sea freshened sufficiently to send most of the passengers below, leaving those who remained to be finally dispersed by the penetrating drizzle that is generally to be met with off the English coast. Arthur, left alone on the heaving deck, surveyed the scene, and thought it very desolate. Around was a grey waste of tossing waters, illumined here and there by the setting rays of an angry sun, above, a wild and windy sky, with not even a sea-gull in all its space, and in the far distance a white and fading line, which was the shore of England.

Faint it grew, and fainter yet, and, as it disappeared, he thought of Angela, and sorrow fell upon him. When, he wondered sadly, should he again look into her eyes, and hold that proud beauty in his arms; what fate awaited them in the future which stretched before them, dim as the darkening ocean, and more uncertain. Alas! he could not tell, he only felt that it was very bitter to be parted thus from her to whom had been given his whole heart's love, to know that every fleeting moment widened a breach already far too wide, and not to know if it would again be narrowed, or if this farewell was the last. Then he thought, if it should be the last, if she should die or desert him, what would his life be worth to him? A consciousness within him answered, "nothing." And, in a degree, his conclusion was right; for although, fortunately, it is not often in the power of any single passion

to render life altogether worthless, it is certain, when it strikes in youth, that there is no sickness so sore as that of the heart; no sorrow more keen, and no evil more lasting, than those connected with its disappointments and its griefs. For other sorrows, life has salves and consolations, but a pure and enduring passion is not all of this world, and to cure its sting we must look to something beyond the world's quackeries. Other griefs can find sympathy and expression, and become absorbed little by little in the variety of life's issues. But love, as it is, and should be understood—not the faint ghost that arrays itself in stolen robes, and says, "I am love," but love, the strong and the immortal, the pass-key to the happy skies, the angel cipher we read, but cannot understand—such love as this, and there is none other true, can find no full solace here, not even in its earthly satisfaction.

For still it beats against its mortal bars and rends the heart that holds it; still strives to pass hence with that kindred soul to the heaven whence it came, there to be mingled with its other life and clothed with a divine identity; there to satisfy the aspirations that throb within their fleshly walls, with the splendour and the peace and the full measure of the eternal joys it knows await its coming.

And is it not a first-fruit of this knowledge, that the thoughts of those who are plunged into the fires of a pure devotion fly upwards as surely as the sparks? Nothing but the dross, the grosser earthly part, is purged away by their chastening sorrow, which is, in truth, a discipline for finer souls. For did there ever yet live the man or woman who, loving truly, has suffered, and, the

fires burnt out, has not risen Phœnix-like from their ashes, purer and better, and holding in the heart an undying hope? Never; for these have walked bare-footed upon the holy ground, it is the flames from the Altar that have purged them and left their light within! And surely this holds also good of those who have loved and lost, of those who have been scorned or betrayed; of the suffering army that cry aloud of the empty bitterness of life and dare not hope beyond. They do not understand that, having once loved truly, it is not possible that they should altogether lose: that there is to their pain and the dry-rot of their hopes, as to everything else in Nature, an end and object. Shall the soul be immortal, and its best essence but a thing of air? Shall the one thought by day, and the one dream by night, the star which guides us across life's mirage, and which will still shine serene at the moment of our fall from the edge of Time: amidst all that makes us what we are, shall this alone be chosen out to see corruption, to be cast off and forgotten in the grave? Never! There, by the workings of a Providence we cannot understand, that germ awaits fruition. There, too, shall we know the wherefore of our sorrow at which we now so often wonder; and learn the uses and pluck the fruits of an affliction that on earth filled us with such sick longing, and such an aching pain.

Let these speculations be forgiven, for the subject is full of interest for us mortals. Indeed, it may chance that, if the reader is more than five-and-twenty, these lines may even have been scanned without impatience, for there are many who have the memory of a lost Angela hidden away somewhere in the records of their past, and who are fain, in the breathing spaces of their lives, to dream that they will find her wandering in that wide

Eternity where "all human barriers fall, all human relations end, and love ceases to be a crime."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADEIRA.

THE morning after the vessel left Dartmouth brought with it lovely weather, brisk and clear, with a fresh breeze that just topped the glittering swell with white. There was, however, a considerable roll on the ship, and those poor wretches, who for their sins are given to sea-sickness, were not yet happy. Presently Arthur observed the pretty, black-eyed girl—poor thing! she did not look very pretty now—creep on to the deck, and attempt to walk about, an effort which promptly resulted in a fall into the scuppers. He picked her up, and asked if she would not like to sit down, but she faintly declined, saying that she did not mind falling so long as she could walk a little—she did not feel so sick when she walked. Under these circumstances, he could hardly do less than help her, which he did in the only way at all practicable with one so weak, namely, by walking her about on his arm.

In the midst of his interesting peregrinations, he observed Mrs. Carr gazing out of the deck cabin window, looking, he thought, pale, but sweetly pretty, and rather cross. When that lady saw that she was observed, she pulled the curtain with a jerk and vanished. Shortly after this Arthur's companion vanished too, circumstances over which she had no control compelling her, and Arthur himself sat down rather relieved.

But he was destined that day to play knight-errant to ladies in distress. Presently Mrs. Carr's cabin-door opened, and that lady herself emerged therefrom, holding

on to the side-rail. He had just begun to observe how charmingly she was dressed, when some qualm seized her, and she turned to re-enter the cabin. But the door had swung-to with the roll of the vessel, and she could not open it. Impelled by an agony of doubt, she flew to the side, and, to his horror, sprang with a single bound on to the broad rail that surmounted the bulwark netting, and remained seated there, holding only to a little rope that hung down from the awning-chain. The ship, which was at the moment rolling pretty heavily, had just reached the full angle of her windward roll, and was preparing for a heavy swing to leeward. Arthur, seeing that Mrs. Carr would in a few seconds certainly be flung out to sea, rushed promptly forward and lifted her from the rail. It was none too soon, for next moment down the great ship went with a lurch into a trough of the sea, hurling him, with her in his arms, up against the bulwarks, and, to say truth, hurting him considerably. But, if he expected any thanks for this exploit, he was destined to be disappointed, for no sooner had he set his lovely burden down, than she made use of her freedom to stamp upon the deck.

"How could you be so foolish?" said he. "In another moment you would have been flung out to sea!"

"And pray, Mr. Heigham," she answered, in a cutting and sarcastic voice, "is that my business or your own? Surely it would have been time enough for you to interfere when I asked you to jump over after me."

Arthur drew himself up to his full height and looked dignified—he could look dignified when he liked.

"I do not quite understand you, Mrs. Carr," he said, with a little bow. "What I did, I did to save you from going overboard. Next time that such a little adventure

comes in my way, I hope, for my own sake, that it may concern a lady possessed of less rudeness and more gratitude."

And then, glaring defiance at each other, they separated; she marching off with all the dignity of an offended queen to the "sweet seclusion that a cabin grants," whilst he withdrew moodily to a bench, comforted, however, not a little by the thought that he had given Mrs. Carr a Roland for her Oliver.

Mrs. Carr's bound on to the bulwarks had been the last effort of that prince of demons, sea-sickness, rending her ere he left. When the occasion for remaining there had thus passed away, she soon tired of her cabin and of listening to the inarticulate moans of her beloved Agatha, who was a most faithful subject of the fiend, one who would never desert his banner so long as he could roll the tiniest wave. So sallying forth, she took up her position in the little society of the ship.

But between Arthur and herself there was no attempt at reconciliation. Each felt their wrongs to be eternal as the rocks. At luncheon they looked unutterable things from different sides of the table; going in to dinner, she cut him with the sweetest grace, and on the following morning they naturally removed to situations as remote from each other as the cubic area of a mail steamer would allow.

"Pretty, very much so, but ill-mannered; not quite a lady, I should say," reflected Arthur to himself, with a superior smile.

"I detest him," said Mrs. Carr to herself, "at least, I think I do; but how neatly he put me down! There is no doubt about his being a gentleman, though insufferably conceited."

These uncharitable thoughts rankled in their respective minds about 12 A.M. What then was Arthur's disgust, on descending a little late to luncheon that day, to be informed by the resplendent chief-steward—who, for some undiscovered reason, always reminded him of Pharaoh's butler—that the captain had altered the places at table, and that this alteration involved his being placed next to none other than Mrs. Carr. Everybody was already seated, and it was too late to protest, at any rate for that meal; so he had to choose between submission and going without luncheon. Being extremely hungry, he decided for the first alternative, and reluctantly brought himself to a halt next his avowed enemy.

But surprises, like sorrows, come in battalions, a fact that he very distinctly realised when, having helped himself to some chicken, he heard a clear voice at his side address him by name.

"Mr. Heigham," said the voice, "I have not yet thanked you for your kindness to Miss Terry. I am commissioned to assure you that she is very grateful, since she is prevented by circumstances for doing so herself."

"I am much gratified," he replied, stiffly; "but really I did nothing to deserve thanks, and if I had," he added, with a touch of sarcasm, "I should not have expected any."

"Oh! what a cynic you must be," she answered, with a rippling laugh, "as though women, helpless as they are, were not always thankful for the tiniest attention. Did not the pretty girl with the black eyes thank you for your attentions yesterday, for instance?"

"Did the lady with the brown eyes thank me for my attentions—my very necessary attentions—yesterday, for instance?" he answered, somewhat mollified, for the laugh

and the voice would have thawed a human icicle, and, with all his faults, Arthur was not an icicle.

"No, she did not; she deferred doing so in order that she might do it better. It was very kind of you to help me, and I daresay that you saved my life, and I—I beg your pardon for being so cross, but being sea-sick always makes me cross, even to those who are kindest to me. Do you forgive me? Please forgive me; I really am quite unhappy when I think of my behaviour." And Mrs. Carr shot a glance at him that would have cleared the North-West Passage for a man-of-war.

"Please don't apologise," he said, humbly. "I really have nothing to forgive. I am aware that I took a liberty, as I think you put it, but I thought that I was justified by the circumstances."

"It is not generous of you, Mr. Heigham, to throw my words into my teeth. I had forgotten all about them. But I will set your want of feeling against my want of gratitude, and we will kiss and be friends. By that phrase," she added hastily, blushing a little—that is, her cheek took a deeper shade of coral—"I mean that we will not cut each other after lunch."

"You bring me down into a very prosaic world; but I accept your terms, whatever they are. I am conquered."

"For exactly half an hour. But let us talk sense. Are you going to stop at Madeira?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"I don't know; till I get tired of it, I suppose. Is it nice, Madeira?"

"Charming. I live there half the year."

"Ah, then I can well believe that it is charming!"

"Mr. Heigham, you are paying compliments. I thought that you looked above that sort of thing."

"In the presence of misfortune and of beauty"—here he bowed—"all men are reduced to the same level. Talk to me from behind the curtain, or let me turn my back upon you, and you may expect to hear work-a-day prose—but face to face, I fear that you must put up with compliment."

"A neat way of saying that you have had enough of me. Your compliments are two-edged. Good-bye for the present." And she rose, leaving Arthur—well, rather amused.

After this they saw a good deal of each other—that is to say, they conversed together for at least thirty minutes out of every sixty during an average day of fourteen hours, and in the course of these conversations she learned nearly everything about him, except his engagement to Angela, and she shrewdly guessed at that, or, rather, at some kindred circumstance in his career. Arthur, on the other hand, learned quite everything about her, for her life was open as the day, and would have borne reporting in the *Times* newspaper. But nevertheless he found it extremely interesting.

"You must be a busy woman," he said one morning, when he had been listening to one of her rattling accounts of her travels and gaieties, sprinkled over, as it was, with shrewd remarks, and illumined by the keen insight into character that made her talk so charming.

"Busy, no; one of the idlest in the world, and a very worthless one to boot," she answered, with a little sigh.

"Then, why don't you change your life? it is in your own hands, if ever anybody's was."

"Do you think so? I doubt if anybody's life is in

their own hands. We follow an appointed course; if we did not, it would be impossible to understand why so many sensible, clever people make such a complete mess of their existence. They can't do it from choice."

"At any rate, you have not made a mess of yours, and your appointed course seems a very pleasant one."

"Yes; and the sea beneath us is very smooth, but it has been rough before, and will be rough again—there is no stability in the sea. As to making a mess of my life, who knows what I may not accomplish in that way? Prosperity cannot shine down fear of the future, it only throws it into darker relief. Myself I am afraid of the future—it is unknown, and to me what is unknown is not magnificent, but terrible. The present is enough for me. I do not like speculation, and I never loved the dark."

And, as they talked, Madeira, in all its summer glory, loomed up out of the ocean, for they had passed the "Desertas" and "Porto Santo" by night, and for a while they were lost in the contemplation of one of the most lovely and verdant scenes that the world can show. Before they had well examined it, however, the vessel had dropped her anchor, and was surrounded by boats full of custom-house officials, boats full of diving-boys, of vegetables, of wicker chairs and tables, of parrots, fruit, and "other articles too numerous to mention," as they say in the auctioneers' catalogues, and they knew that it was time to go ashore.

"Well, it has been a pleasant voyage," said Mrs. Carr. "I am glad you are not going on."

"So am I."

"You will come and see me to-morrow, will you not? Look, there is my house," and she pointed to a large,

white house opposite Leuw Rock, that had a background of glossy foliage, and commanded a view of the sea. "If you come, I will show you my beetles. And, if you care to come next day, I will show you my mummies."

"And, if I come the next, what will you show me?"

"So often as you may come," she said, with a little tremor in her voice, "I shall find something to show you."

Then they shook hands and took their respective ways, she—together with the unfortunate Miss Terry, who looked like a resuscitated corpse—on to the steam-launch that was waiting for her, and he in the boat belonging to Miles' Hotel.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HALL OF THE DEAD.

A MINUTE or two after the boat in which Arthur was being piloted to the shore, under the guidance of the manager of Miles' Hotel, had left the side of the vessel, Mrs. Carr's steam-launch shot up alongside of them, its brass-work gleaming in the sunlight like polished gold. On the deck, near the little wheel, stood Mrs. Carr herself, and by her side, her martial cloak around her, lay Miss Terry, still as any log.

"Mr. Heigham," said Mrs. Carr, in a voice that sounded across the water like a silver bell, "I forgot that you will not be able to find your way to my place by yourself to-morrow, so I will send down a bullock-car to fetch you; you have to travel about with bullocks here, you know. Good-bye," and, before he could answer, the launch's head was round, and she was tearing through the swell at the rate of fourteen knots.

"That's her private launch," said the manager of the

hotel to Arthur, "it is the quickest in the island, and she always goes at full steam. She must have come some way round to tell you that, too. There's her place, over there."

"Mrs. Carr comes here every year, does she not?"

"Oh, yes, every year; but she is very early this year; our season does not begin yet, you know. She is a great blessing to the place, she gives so much away to the poor peasants. At first she used to come with old Mr. Carr, and a wonderful nurse they say she made the old gentleman till he died."

"Does she entertain much?"

"Not as a rule, but sometimes she gives great balls, splendid affairs, and a series of dinner-parties that are the talk of the island. She hardly ever goes out anywhere, which makes the ladies in the place angry, but, I believe, that they all go to her balls and dinners. Mostly, she spends her time up in the hills, collecting butterflies and beetles. She has got the most wonderful collection of Egyptian curiosities up at the house there, too, though why she keeps them here instead of in England, I am sure I don't know. Her husband began the collection when he was a young man, and collected all his life, and she has gone on with it since."

"I wonder that she has not married again."

"Well, it can't be for want of asking, if half of what they say is true; for, according to that, every single gentleman under fifty who has been at Madeira during the last five years has had a try at her, but she wouldn't look at one of them. But of course that is gossip—and here we are at the landing-place. Sit steady, sir; those fellows will pull the boat up."

Had it not been for the preoccupied and uncomfort-

able state of his mind, that took the flavour out of all that he did, and persistently thrust a skeleton amidst the flowers of every landscape, Arthur should by rights have enjoyed himself very much at Madeira.

To live in one of the lofty rooms of "Miles' Hotel," protected by thick walls and cool, green shutters, to feel that you are enjoying all the advantages of a warm climate without its drawbacks, and that, too, however much people in England may be shivering—which they do mostly all the year round—is in itself a luxury. And so it is, if the day is hot, to dine chiefly off fish and fruit, and such fruit! and then to exchange the dining-room for the cool portico, with the sea-breeze sweeping through it, and, pipe in hand, to sink into a slumber that even the diabolical shrieks of the parrots, tied by the leg in a line below, are powerless to disturb. Or, if you be energetic —I speak of Madeira energy—you may stroll down the little terraced walk, under the shade of your landlord's vines, and contemplate the glowing mass of greenery that in this heavenly island makes a garden. You can do more than this even; for, having penetrated through the brilliant flower-beds, and recruited exhausted nature under a fig-tree, you can engage, in true English fashion, in a game of lawn-tennis, which done, you will again seek the shade of the creeping vines or spreading bananas, and in a springy hammock take your well-earned repose.

All these things are the quintessence of luxury, so much so that he who has once enjoyed them will long to turn lotos-eater, forget the painful and laborious past, and live and die at "Miles' Hotel." Oh, Madeira! gem of the ocean, land of pine-clad mountains that foolish men love to climb, valleys where wise ones much prefer to rest, and of smells that both alike abhor; Madeira of the

sunny sky and azure sea, land flowing with milk and honey, and overflowing with population, if only you belonged to the country on which you depend for a livelihood, what a perfect place you would be, and how poetical one could grow about you! a consummation which, fortunately for my readers, the recollection of the open drains, the ill-favoured priests, and Portuguese officials effectually prevents.

On the following morning, at twelve punctually, Arthur was informed that the conveyance had arrived to fetch him. He went down, and was quite appalled at its magnificence. It was sledge-like in form, built to hold four, and mounted on wooden runners that glided over the round pebbles with which the Madeira streets are paved, with scarcely a sound, and as smoothly as though they ran on ice. The chariot, as Arthur always called it afterwards, was built of beautiful woods, and lined and curtained throughout with satin, whilst the motive power was supplied by two splendidly harnessed white oxen. Two native servants, handsome young fellows, dressed in a kind of white uniform, accompanied the sledge, and saluted Arthur on his appearance with much reverence.

It took him, however, some time before he could make up his mind to embark in a conveyance that reminded him of the description of Cleopatra's galley, and smelt more sweet; but finally he got in, and off he started, feeling that he was the observed of all observers, and followed by at least a score of beggars, each afflicted with some peculiar and dreadful deformity or disease. And thus, in triumphal guise, they slid down the quaint and narrow streets, squeezed in for the sake of shade between a double line of tall, green-shuttered houses; over the bridges that span the vast open drains; past the

ochre-coloured cathedral; down the promenade, edged with great magnolia-trees, that made the air heavy with their perfume, and where twice a week the band plays, and the Portuguese officials march up and down in all the pomp and panoply of office; onward through the dip, where the town slopes downwards to the sea; then up again through more streets, and past a stretch of dead wall, after which the chariot wheels through some iron gates, and Arthur is in fairyland. On each side of the carriage-way there spreads a garden calculated to make English horticulturists gnash their teeth with envy, through the bowers of which he could catch peeps of green turf and of the blue sea beyond.

Here the cabbage palm shot its smooth and lofty trunk high into the air, there the bamboo waved its leafy ostrich plumes, and all about and around the soil was spread like an Indian shawl, with many a gorgeous flower and many a splendid fruit. Arthur thought of the Garden of Eden and the Isles of the Blest, and whilst his eyes, accustomed to nothing better than our poor English roses, were still fixed upon the blazing masses of pomegranate flower, and his senses were filled with the sweet scent of orange and magnolia blooms, the oxen halted before the portico of a stately building, white-walled and green-shuttered like all Madeira houses.

Then the slaves of the chariot assisted him to descend, whilst other slaves of the door bowed him up the steps, and he stood in a great cool hall, dazzling dark after the brilliancy of the sunlight. And here no slave awaited him, but the princess of this fair domain, none other than Mildred Carr herself, clad all in summer white, and with a smile of welcome in her eyes.

"I am so glad that you have come. How do you like Madeira? Do you find it very hot?"

"I have not seen much of it yet; but this place is lovely, it is like fairyland, and, I believe, that you," he added, with a bow, "are the fairy queen."

"Compliments again, Mr. Heigham. Well, I was the sleeping beauty last time, so one may as well be a queen for a change. I wonder what you will call me next?"

"Let me see: shall we say—an angel?"

"Mr. Heigham, stop talking nonsense, and come into the drawing-room."

He followed her, laughing, into an apartment that, from its noble proportions and beauty, might fairly be called magnificent. Its ceiling was panelled with worked timber, and its floor beautifully inlaid with woods of various hue, whilst the walls were thickly covered with pictures, chiefly sea-pieces, and all by good masters. He had, however, but little time to look about him, for a door opened at the further end of the room, and admitted the portly person of Miss Terry, arrayed in a gigantic sun-hat and a pair of green spectacles. She seemed very hot, and held in her hand a piece of brown paper, inside of which something was violently scratching.

"I've caught him at last," she said, "though he did avoid me all last year. I've caught him."

"Good gracious! caught what?" asked Arthur, with great interest.

"What! why him that Mildred wanted," she replied, regardless of grammar in her excitement. "Just look at him, he's beautiful."

Thus admonished, Arthur carefully undid the brown paper, and next moment started back with an exclama-

tion, and began to dance about with an enormous red beetle grinding its jaws into his finger.

"Oh, keep still, do, pray," called Miss Terry, in alarm, "don't shake him off on any account, or we shall lose him for the want of a little patience, as I did when he bit my finger last year. If you'll keep him quite still, he won't leave go, and I'll ring for John to bring the chloroform bottle."

Arthur, feeling that the interests of science were matters of a higher importance than the well-being of his finger, obeyed her injunction to the letter, hanging his arm (and the beetle) over the back of a chair and looking the picture of silent misery.

"Quite still, if you please, Mr. Heigham, quite still; is not the animal's tenacity interesting?"

"No doubt to you, but I hope your pet beetle is not poisonous, for he is gnashing his pincers together inside my finger."

"Never mind, we will treat you with caustic presently. Mildred, don't laugh so much, but come and look at him; he's lovely. John, please be quick with that chloroform bottle."

"If this sort of thing happens often, I don't think that I should collect beetles from choice, at least not large ones," groaned Arthur.

"Oh, dear," laughed Mrs. Carr, "I never saw anything so absurd. I don't know which looks most savage, you or the beetle."

"Don't make all that noise, Mildred, you will frighten him, and if once he flies we shall never catch him in this big room."

Here, fortunately for Arthur, the servant arrived with

the required bottle, into which the ferocious insect was triumphantly stoppered by Miss Terry.

"I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Heigham, you are a true collector."

"For the first and last time," mumbled Arthur, who was sucking his finger.

"I am infinitely obliged to you, too, Mr. Heigham," said Mrs. Carr, as soon as she had recovered from her fit of laughing; "the beetle is really very rare; it is not even in the British Museum. But come, let us go in to luncheon."

After that meal was over, Mrs. Carr asked her guest which he would like to see, her collection of beetles or of mummies."

"Thank you, Mrs. Carr, I have had enough of beetles for one day, so I vote for the mummies."

"Very well. Will you come, Agatha?"

"Now, Mildred, you know very well that I won't come. Just think, Mr. Heigham: I only saw the nasty things once, and then they gave me the creeps every night for a fortnight. As though those horrid Egyptian 'fellahs' weren't ugly enough when they are alive without going and making great skin and bone dolls of them —pah!"

"Agatha persists in believing that my mummies are the bodies of people like she saw in Egypt last year."

"And so they are, Mildred. That last one you got is just like the boy who used to drive my donkey at Cairo—the one that died, you know—I believe they just stuffed him, and said that he was an ancient king. Ancient king, indeed!" And Miss Terry departed, in search of more beetles.

"Now, Mr. Heigham, you must follow me. The museum is not in the house. Wait, I will get a hat."

In a minute she returned, and led the way across a strip of garden to a detached building, with a broad verandah, facing the sea. Scarcely ten feet from this verandah, and on the edge of the sheer precipice, was built a low wall, leaning over which Arthur could hear the wavelets lapping against the hollow rock two hundred feet beneath him. Here they stopped for a moment to look at the vast expanse of ocean, glittering in the sunlight like a sea of molten sapphires and heaving as gently as an infant's bosom.

"It is very lovely; the sea moves just enough to show that it is only asleep."

"Yes; but I like it best when it is awake, when it blows a hurricane—it is magnificent. The whole cliff shakes with the shock of the waves, and sometimes the spray drives over in sheets. That is when I like to sit here; it exhilarates me, and makes me feel as though I belonged to the storm, and was strong with its strength. Come, let us go in."

The entrance to the verandah was from the end that faced the house, and to gain it they passed under the boughs of a large magnolia-tree. Going through glass doors that opened outwards into the verandah, Mrs. Carr entered a room luxuriously furnished as a boudoir. This had apparently no other exit, and Arthur was beginning to wonder where the museum could be, when she took a tiny bramah key from her watch-chain, and with it opened a door that was papered and painted to match the wall exactly. He followed her, and found himself in a stone passage, dimly lighted from above, and sloping downwards, that led to a doorway graven in the rock,

on the model of those to be seen at the entrance of Egyptian temples.

"Now, Mr. Heigham," she said, flinging open another door, and stepping forward, "you are about to enter 'The Hall of the Dead.'"

He went in, and a strange sight met his gaze. They were standing in the centre of one side of a vast cave, that ran right and left at right angles to the passage. The light poured into it in great rays from skylights in the roof, and by it he could see that it was hollowed out of the virgin rock, and measured some sixty feet or more in length, by about forty wide, and thirty high. Down the length of each side of the great chamber ran a line of six polished sphinxes, which had been hewn out of the surrounding granite, on the model of those at Carnac, whilst the walls were elaborately painted after the fashion of an Egyptian sepulchre. Here Osiris held his dread tribunal on the spirit of the departed; here the warrior sped onward in his charging chariot; here the harper swept his sounding chords; and here, again, crowned with lotus flowers, those whose corpses lay around held their joyous festivals.

In the respective centres of each end of the stone chamber a colossus towered in its silent and unearthly grandeur. That to the right was a statue of Osiris, judge of the souls of the dead, seated on his judgment-seat, and holding in his hand the scourge and the bent-headed sceptre. Facing him at the other end of the hall was the effigy of the mighty Rameses, his broad brow encircled by that kingly symbol which few in the world's history have worn so proudly, and his noble features impressing those who gaze upon them from age to age with a sense of scornful power and melancholy calm,

such as does not belong to the countenances of the men of their own time. And all around, under this solemn guardianship, each upon a polished slab of marble, and enclosed in a case of thick glass, lay the corpses of the Egyptian dead, swathed in numberless wrappings, as in their day the true religion that they held was swathed in symbols and in mummeries.

Here were to be found the high-priest of the mysteries of Isis, the astronomer whose lore could read the prophecies that are written in the stars, the dark magician, the renowned warrior, the noble, the musician with his cymbals by his side, the fair maiden who had—so said her cedar coffin-boards—died of love and sorrow, and the royal babe, all sleeping the same sleep, and waiting the same awakening. This princess must have been well known to Joseph, that may have been she who rescued Moses from the waters, whilst the babe belongs to a dynasty of which the history was already merging into tradition when the great pyramid reared its head on Egypt's fertile plains.

Arthur stood, awed at the wonderful sight.

"Never before," said he, in that whisper which we involuntarily use in the presence of the dead, "did I realise my own insignificance."

The thought was abruptly put, but the words represented well what was passing in his mind, what must pass in the mind of any man of culture and sensibility when he gazes on such a sight. For in such presences the human mite of to-day, fluttering in the sun and walking on the earth that these have known and walked four thousand years ago, must indeed learn how infinitely small is the place that he occupies in the tale of things created; and yet, if to his culture and sensibility he adds

religion, a word of living hope hovers on those dumb lips. For where are the spirits of those that lie before him in their eternal silence! Answer, withered lips, and tell us what judgment has Osiris given, and what has Thoth written in his awful book? Four thousand years! Old human husk, if thy dead carcass can last so long, what limit is there to the life of the soul it held?

"Did you collect all these?" asked Arthur, when he had made a superficial examination of the almost countless treasures of the museum.

"Oh, no; Mr. Carr spent half of his long life, and more money than I can tell you, in getting this collection together. It was the passion of his life, and he had this cave hollowed at enormous cost, because he thought that the air here would be less likely to injure them than the English fogs. I have added to it, however. I got those papyri and that beautiful bust of Berenice, the one in black marble. Did you ever see such hair?"

Arthur thought to himself that he had at that moment some not far from his heart that must be quite as beautiful, but he did not say so.

"Look, here are some curious things;" and she opened an air-tight case that contained some discoloured grains and a few lumps of shrivelled substance.

"What are they?"

"This is wheat taken from the inside of a mummy, and those are supposed to be hyacinth bulbs. They came from the mummy-case of that baby prince, and I have been told that they would still grow if planted."

"I can scarcely believe that: the principle of life must be extinct."

"Wise people say, you know, that the principle of life can never become extinct in anything that has once

lived, though it may change its form; but I do not pretend to understand these things. However, we will settle the question, for we will plant one, and, if it grows, I will give the flower to you. Choose one."

Arthur took the biggest lump from the case, and examined it curiously.

"I have not much faith in your hyacinth; I am sure that it is dead."

"Ah! but many things that seem more dead than that have the strangest way of suddenly breaking into life," she said, with a little sigh. "Give it to me; I will have it planted;" and then, with a quick glance upward, "I wonder if you will be here to see it bloom?"

"I don't think that either of us will see it bloom in this world," he answered, laughing, and took his leave.

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